

Unearthing Modernism in the Strata of Antiquity: Paul Nash and the Deep Past

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Declaration of Authorship

I Sarah Fill..... (please insert name) hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

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Abstract

This thesis examines antiquity as a vital component in the relationship of modern art and national identity in 1930s Britain. To exemplify the reinterpretation of antiquity within British modernist art, I focus on the work of the painter Paul Nash (1889-1946) and his engagement with the early-modern polymath Thomas Browne (1605-1682) and the eighteenth-century antiquarian William Stukeley (1687-1765). Browne and Stukeley used the past as a means to muse, in the terms of religion and mythology, upon the present. In turn they revitalised antiquity by investing it with their own imaginations. I argue that Nash revitalised the past in a manner akin to Browne and Stukeley, although he did not do this with the religious spirit of the early modern period but reconstructed it through the building blocks of continental modernism. I argue that Nash's engagement with antiquarianism helped form a critique of the archaeological practice he witnessed at Avebury and Maiden Castle in the mid 1930s. While the science-orientated discipline of archaeology participated in the death of myth, Browne and Stukeley formed part of mythology's long narrative tradition. I examine how Nash's landscapes also formed part of this tradition and I consider the paintings' relationships to the mythic aspects of interwar modernism.

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Introduction

Through the work of Paul Nash (1889-1946), this thesis examines the relationship between the deep past, modern art and modernity in 1930s Britain.¹ Chapter one concentrates on Nash's illustrations for the 1932 Cassell edition of Sir Thomas Browne's (1605-82) *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus*, considering its place within interwar British modernism. Chapter two observes the influence of William Stukeley's (1687-1765) *Abury: A Temple of the British Druids* (1743) on Nash's approach to Neolithic Avebury and contemplates its balancing effect within Nash's critique of Alexander Keiller's (1889-1955) archaeological excavations of the site. Continuing this critique, chapter three details Nash's surrealist approach to the ancient Dorset landscape and discusses its opposition to the excavations carried out by Sir Robert Eric Mortimer Wheeler (1890-1976) at Maiden Castle. I argue that Nash approached the past in a manner more akin to certain antiquarians than the 1930s British archaeologist. Browne and Stukeley can be aligned with their archaeological successors through their detailed examinations of ancient artefacts. However, unlike the archaeologist, these antiquarians often delimited empirical study within frameworks of myth and religion. Browne's *Pseudodoxia Epidemica. Or Enquiries Into Very Many Received Tenents and Commonly Presumed Truths* (1646) employed empirical observation to disprove commonly held false beliefs. The text gave focus to sub-visible activity, specifically 'the operations of magnetic and electrical effluvia, the opaque workings of seminal principles and the interactions of matter and spirit'.² Browne examined naturally occurring magnets called lodestones and observed that 'if a piece of iron be fastened in the side of a bowl or basin of water, a loadstone swimming freely in a boat of cork, will presently make unto it'.³ For Browne these invisible forces were proof of God's agency and he claimed that his 'experiments

¹ Throughout the thesis I use the term Britain rather than England except when a source specifically references England and Englishness.

² Killeen, *Biblical Scholarship, Science and Politics in Early Modern England: Thomas Browne and the Thorny Place of Knowledge*, 26.

³ Browne, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica. Or Enquiries Into Very Many Received Tenents and Commonly Presumed Truths*, 73.

and undeniable effects, enforce the wonder of its Maker'.⁴ Kevin Killeen explains that Browne's concern with the invisible fabric of the universe 'develops a language of enquiry that embraces the tentative and encourages suspension of judgement'.⁵ I demonstrate how Browne's fascination with unseen forces closely accords with Nash's view of ancient landscapes, which depend upon the interrelation of the observable and unobservable. Taking his cue from Stukeley, who promoted Avebury as a Druid temple, Nash highlighted the earthwork's spiritual underpinning through recourse to the personal symbolism he had been developing in his paintings since the 1910s. For Browne, Stukeley and Nash, the invisible was the defining aspect of the deep past. In contrast, the archaeologist sought to make the invisible visible in order to render an empirically validated past.⁶ Under the influence of Browne and Stukeley, Nash focused on ill-defined remnants of ancient things and provided an alternative to the analytic, objective and scientific mindset of modernity that archaeology claimed to follow.⁷ Browne and Stukeley made urns and Neolithic earthworks receptacles for their religious and philosophical musings, resurrecting antiquity with the religious spirit of the early modern period. Similarly, Nash reconstructed the past through the building blocks of continental modernism. This process reformulated conceptions of both the antique and the avant-garde, causing Nash's work to represent the origins of inherited British culture and become the blueprint of its future.

Nash's engagement with the deep past began when he painted the Wittenham Clumps in the early 1910s (fig. 1). The Clumps are a small group of hills in Oxfordshire, supposedly crowned by the oldest planted hilltop beeches in England. They lie near Nash's family home and he made annual trips to them. His autobiography recalled the Clumps:

⁴ Ibid., 86.

⁵ Killeen, *Biblical Scholarship, Science and Politics in Early Modern England: Thomas Browne and the Thorny Place of Knowledge*, 25.

⁶ Thomas, 'Archaeology's Place in Modernity', 18.

⁷ Ibid., 30.

An ancient British Camp, it stood up with extraordinary prominence above the river at Shillingford. There were two hills, both dome-like and each planted with a thick clump of trees whose mass had a curiously symmetrical sculptured form. At the foot of these hills grew the dense wood of Wittenham, part of the early forest where the polecat still yelled in the night hours.⁸

From the top of the Clumps one can see the landscape extend for miles; conversely, certain neighbouring vantage points, such as Boars Hill and Whiteleaf Cross, give an excellent panorama of the Clumps. In 1931 Nash produced the oil painting *Whiteleaf Cross* (fig. 2), which depicts a large cross that has been carved into the side of a chalk hill. The Cross was first recorded as an antiquity by Francis Wise in 1742, suggesting that it is an eighteenth-century hill carving. However, the Cross has prehistoric pretensions as it echoes the nearby hill carving, the Uffington White Horse, which dates back three thousand years. As Nash stood beside Whiteleaf Cross he may have painted the ancient Clumps and constructed a correspondence between the two sites that suggested an interest in a network of ancient places rather than the discrete historical identity of a single site. This interest is implied in a painting like *Landscape of the Megaliths* (1934, fig. 3), which unites two unrelated ancient sites within a single landscape. Nash presented Avebury standing stones positioned before the Clumps, even though these sites exist some forty miles apart in Wiltshire and Oxfordshire respectively. *Landscape of the Megaliths* suggests that Nash was not restricted by historical fact, but motivated by an experience of the past that he felt became more powerful as a network of ancient sites extended. In 1930 archaeologists had not excavated Whiteleaf or Wittenham and their histories were speculative. Nash implied how insignificant historical certainty was for him when he noted: 'Ever since I remember them the Clumps had meant something to me. I felt their importance long before I knew their history'.⁹ In 1911 Nash wrote to his friend Mercia Oakley and described how this ancient site had captivated him, yet evaded his

⁸ Nash, *Outline: An Autobiography and Other Writings*, 122.

⁹ Ibid.

understanding: ‘The country around and about is marvellous – Grey hollowed hills crowned by old old trees, Pan-ish places down by the river wonderful to think on, full of strange enchantment ... it seemed a beautiful legendary country haunted by old gods long forgotten’.¹⁰ This reference to the god Pan is an early example of the way Nash mythologised the antique. Andrew Causey discusses Nash’s interest in novelists like W. J. Locke and Algernon Blackwood, who wrote stories about city dwellers escaping to the countryside to commune with nature and engage with Pan.¹¹ Causey claims that ‘its formative influence on [Nash’s] later beliefs in the animation of stones and the human qualities of trees cannot be ignored’.¹²

Malcolm Yorke observes that during the early 1910s Nash was beginning to ‘exhibit that peculiarly English whimsy which leads to the milk-and-water paganism of *Peter Pan*, or the embarrassing feyness of the ‘The Piper at the Gates of Dawn’ chapter in *The Wind in the Willows*’.¹³ I argue that Nash’s description of the Clumps echoes precisely that chapter of Kenneth Grahame’s novel. *The Wind in the Willows* (1908) is set in the Thames valley, the familiar Home Counties landscape where Nash grew up and painted for most of his life. Amongst trees of crab apple, wild cherry and sloe, Rat and Mole experience a vision of Pan, which lasts seconds before it disappears into oblivion. Grahame’s description of the creatures’ reaction to this fleeting apparition mirrors, I think, Nash’s relationship to the deep past:

As they stared blankly in dumb misery deepening as they slowly realised all they had seen and all they had lost, a capricious little breeze, dancing up from the surface of the water, tossed the aspens, shook the dewy roses and blew lightly and caressingly in their faces; and with its soft touch came instant oblivion. For this is the last best gift that the kindly demigod is

¹⁰ Nash, *Dear Mercia: Paul Nash Letters to Mercia Oakley, 1909-18*, 39.

¹¹ *The Beloved Vagabond* (1906) by W. J. Locke.

¹² Causey, *Paul Nash: Landscape and the Life of Objects*, 23.

¹³ Yorke, *The Spirit of Place: Nine Neo-Romantic Artists and Their Times*, 36.

careful to bestow on those to whom he has revealed himself in their helping: the gift of forgetfulness.¹⁴

Like Nash at Wittenham, Rat and Mole retain nothing of the ancient Pan but a dim reminiscence of beauty. Both examples express the ephemerality of nature under the impact of modernity, where man is perpetually separated from his past by rendering it obsolete in search of the new. At the end of 'The Piper at the Gates of Dawn' the wind rushes through the reeds and repeatedly sings to the animals, 'but then you shall forget'.¹⁵ The ancient language of nature momentarily addresses Rat and Mole through their vision of Pan, who the Arcadians named 'the Lord of the Wood'.¹⁶ What Virginia Woolf called the 'knotted roots of infinite ages' are brought to light with Pan's brief appearance and then they swiftly return underground.¹⁷ Similarly, the ancient language of the Wittenham Clumps evaded Nash, for he never knew their past, but merely sensed it from a vague reminiscence of 'old gods long forgotten'.¹⁸ Nash turned to myth to supplement his estrangement from the past but even myth remained obscure. The animals faintly comprehend Pan's song, as the reeds evoke the sound of his pipes: "So I was thinking," murmured the Rat, dreamful and languid. 'Dance-music – the lilting sort that runs on without a stop – but with words in it, too – it passes into words and out of them again – I catch them at intervals – then it is dancing music once more, and then nothing but the reeds' soft thin whispering".¹⁹ In *The Wind in the Willows* nature has a language with which the animals are only partially attuned. Although the novel generates a nostalgic vision of an English riverbank lined with willow trees and dotted with rowboats, modernity creeps into the lives of these animals with Toad's motoring and steam train adventures. Despite the novel's setting, these are 'modern' creatures and thus their connection with nature is somewhat atrophied. Grahame writes that 'with his ear to the reed-stems he [Mole]

¹⁴ Grahame, *The Wind in the Willows*, 182-3.

¹⁵ Ibid., 188.

¹⁶ Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, 465.

¹⁷ Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*, 61.

¹⁸ Nash, *Dear Mercia: Paul Nash Letters to Mercia Oakley, 1909-18*, 39.

¹⁹ Grahame, *The Wind in the Willows*, 187.

caught, at intervals, something of what the wind went whispering so constantly among them'.²⁰ Rat, Mole and Toad allegorise the urban middle class in its estrangement from nature and, consequently, its detachment from tradition. Indeed, we might remember that the book begins with Mole as the social climber, who has become bored of his old home and, compelled by 'discontent and longing', seeks out the new world above ground where he finds Rat.²¹ The animals are caught up in the transience of modernity, particularly Toad who is continually engrossed in the newest fads. For these small creatures, the ancient language of nature and its old myths fade quickly from their short memories. Grahame illustrates the animals' detachment from nature at the beginning of 'The Piper at the Gates of Dawn' with his description of the willow wren 'twittering his thin little song, hidden himself in the dark selvedge of the river bank'.²² Interestingly, in 1911, the same year Nash describes the Clumps to Oakley as 'Pan-ish places', he writes a poem called 'Willow-Song' that refers directly to Grahame's novel.²³ Like *The Wind in the Willows*, Nash's poem speaks of man's inability to understand nature and, more specifically, his inability to apprehend the willow wren:

Willow Song

I heard a voice sing in the willows
 Why will he never come?
 'Wait, wait,' saith the wind in the willows
 'Till the willow wren flies home!

I watched the skies grow rose
 And the stars come slowly at last
 And the day's eyes close
 Home flew the willow wren fast

Wind, wind, did he come?
 Did he close her lips at last

²⁰ Ibid., 26.

²¹ Ibid., 3.

²² Ibid., 169.

²³ Nash, *Dear Mercia: Paul Nash letters to Mercia Oakley, 1909-18*, 39.

when the willow wren flew home?²⁴

The Wind in the Willows was published three years before 'Willow-Song' was written and the novel's influence over Nash's poem is clear. The fact that both Nash and Grahame refer to the bird as a willow wren rather than use its proper name, the Willow Warbler, supports the suggestion that Grahame influenced Nash at this time. Grahame only mentions the willow wren at the beginning of 'The Piper at the Gates of Dawn', which indicates that Nash's poem bears a specific relation to this chapter and therefore to Pan. The willow wren echoes Pan's transience because it is a migratory bird that flies to sub-Saharan Africa in the winter and returns to England in the spring. Like Pan, who is traditionally a symbol of fertility, the willow wren signifies the end of winter and the promise of new life. In 'Willow-Song' Nash anxiously awaits the willow wren's return and presumably the springtime that the bird signifies. Throughout the poem the reader never knows whether or not the willow wren has returned. In 1911 Nash seemed to be following ideas presented by Grahame, for he was considering man's estrangement from, yet desire for, a deep understanding of nature and, consequently, the past. I argue that Nash was still exploring man's complex relationship to nature and the past in the 1930s, but now under the guidance of early modern thinkers and modernist peers. *The Wind in the Willows* helps to illustrate Nash's lifelong treatment of the past as a hollow space, filled by man with half-forgotten myths and romantic fantasies.

I argue that James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1890) was another text that inspired Nash's interest in myth. Nash owned a copy and became very interested in it during the 1940s.²⁵ *The Golden Bough* elaborates connections between myths from agricultural societies around the globe and from this constructs a collective history of humankind that

²⁴ Poem Relating to the Drawing 'Combat', with Written Annotations by Margaret Nash and Autograph Poem 'Willowsong' on the Reverse, 1911, TGA 769/1/1-2, Paul Nash Collection, Tate Archive, London.

²⁵ Nash discussed Frazer extensively in a notebook from 1943. Three Notebooks by Paul Nash, ca. 1943, TGA 769/1/62-64, Paul Nash Collection, Tate Archive, London.

is centred on the worship customs, sexual practices and ritualistic habits of ancient man. Frazer's text held sway over the expansive mythical field of modernism and demonstrated to a number of seminal modernists, such as D. H. Lawrence, W. B. Yeats and Ezra Pound, how the myths and superstitions of the ancients still resided within modern man. Through an interpretation of Frazer, modernist myth had the potential to transcend historical time in its perceived ability to connect man across millennia. However, Nash qualifies myth's universalising potential in *Landscape of the Megaliths*. Two Avebury stones stand before the Wittenham Clumps and a sun-like shape makes a diagonal descent across the composition. The painting alludes to multiple myths and histories, like Druidical standing stones, ancient sun worship and Iron Age hill forts. However, unity between these elements is not achieved. The Clumps are situated within two egg-like shapes in the background of the painting. Their appearance is completely flat and they stand upright on the horizon, separating a light pink sky and olive grass. The block colours of sky and grass provide a contrasting backdrop for the stones, which are layered with dashes of red and patches of indigo blue. A thin black line marks the space where the two stones meet. The right stone appears in the foreground, as it overlaps the black line and blocks part of the left stone. However, further up the line the left stone appears to do the same, so that as the eye traces the black line upwards the stones oscillate in and out of the foreground. This gives a sense of depth to an otherwise completely flat landscape and serves to isolate the stones from the rest of the composition. *Landscape of the Megaliths* emphasises detachment between the elements within the painting and, as the viewer struggles to understand the scene, they are reminded that this is Nash's idiosyncratic vision of Avebury and not the ancient site as it had stood or now stands. This imaginative approach to the past links his work to Frazer's most famous acolyte Jessie Weston. Weston wrote the 'anthropological' text *Ritual to Romance* (1920), which examines the various legends of the Holy Grail and their connections to ancient fertility rites. While Frazer views myth with a level of critical detachment, Weston celebrates these ancient stories and retells the past from a highly imaginative perspective. She

demonstrates her lack of rigour in what Patricia Sloane describes as ‘an egregiously uninformed chapter on Tarot cards that Weston begins by confessing she knows nothing about the pack’.²⁶ *Ritual to Romance* is a fantastical text that has been repeatedly dismissed as mere ‘ingenious speculation’.²⁷ However, Weston is interesting because her writing echoes the creative approach to the past that resounds throughout Browne’s essay ‘Urne Buriall’ (1656). *Ritual to Romance* is more akin to art than anthropology and Weston can be aligned with the literary writers she went on to influence, like John Cowper Powys and T. S. Eliot. *Ritual to Romance* is noted as a significant influence on Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (1922), specifically the mythology of the Fisher King and his wasteland habitat. Eliot’s notes to *The Waste Land* state that not ‘only the title, but the plan and a good deal of the incidental symbolism of the poem were suggested by Miss Jessie L. Weston’s book on the Grail legend’.²⁸ In chapter one I examine the early twentieth-century modernists’ interest in myth, like Eliot’s close friend and peer Ezra Pound, which I connect to Browne’s *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus*. This connection helps explain Browne’s revival amongst painters like Nash and writers within the Bloomsbury group, including Lytton Strachey and Virginia Woolf. I discuss how the broad scope of Browne’s insight, married with his vivid imagination, pointed the way for certain British modernists to illuminate the recesses of history with their own creative brilliance.

Thomas Browne

There is close analysis of some of Nash’s individual illustrations for *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus* but the book as a whole has received little scholarly attention. Chapter one examines the engagement between Nash’s illustrations and Browne’s text to highlight an interchange between death and resurrection in relation to antiquity. Nash summarised 1932 in *Outline: An Autobiography and Other Writings* (1949): ‘New work. Experiments in abstraction. Thirty drawings for Urne Buriall and the Garden of Cyrus. –

²⁶ Sloane, ‘Richard Wagner’s Arthurian Sources, Jessie L. Weston and T. S. Eliot’s “The Wasteland”’, 32.

²⁷ Wood, “‘From Ritual to Romance’ by Jessie L. Weston”, 115.

²⁸ Eliot, ‘The Waste Land’, 43.

Garden, abstraction and metaphysical'.²⁹ An illustration from 'The Garden of Cyrus' (1658) called *The Quincunx Naturally Considered* (fig. 4) sketches out this summary. The illustration presents a sunflower, teasel, fern, catkin, pinecone, oak leaf and acorn floating in a blue sky. The sun shines at the top of the composition as a perfect circle and its rectangular rays reach down towards the plants, as if it is suffusing them with formal perfection. Each plant has an almost geometrical shape that is patterned with the criss-cross of the quincunx. *The Quincunx Naturally Considered* partially abstracts the plants into geometric forms and expresses Browne's idea that nature is a symbol of God's perfection on earth and the garden is man's attempt to imitate this perfection. As Browne wrote in *Religio Medici* (1642), God appears through 'his servant Nature, that universal and publick manuscript, that lies expanded unto the eyes of all'.³⁰ *The Quincunx Naturally Considered* depicts this line from 'The Garden of Cyrus': 'the verdant state of things is the Symbole of the Resurrection through the beaming sun and ascending plants'.³¹ By partially abstracting the garden in *The Quincunx Naturally Considered*, Nash reinforced Browne's metaphysical concern for perfection and immortality. Here, Nash did not employ near-abstraction for its own sake but put it in the service of the metaphysical. In the same way, Browne did not attend to the past as past in 'Urne Buriall', but used it as a means of musing on human mortality. Alain Schnapp recognises Browne's indirect approach to antiquity when he writes: 'Poetry is one of the tools of this periegesis in the territory of the ancients. For it only exists in the tension between the observation of the present, the intelligence of the ruins and the imagination of the poets'.³² I modify Schnapp's statement, which perceives a duality between reason and imagination in Browne's work, by stressing a privileging for the latter. For example, the urns, which Browne took for his subject, spoke more of a concern for myth and religion than of the urns themselves. As Woolf remarked on Browne:

²⁹ Nash, *Outline: An Autobiography and Other Writings*, 222.

³⁰ Browne, 'Religio Medici', 21.

³¹ Browne, *Urne Buriall and the Garden of Cyrus ... with Thirty Drawings by Paul Nash. Edited with an Introduction by John Carter*, 59.

³² Schnapp, 'The Many Dimensions of the Antiquary's Practice', 75-6.

His immense egotism has paved the way for all psychological novelists, auto-biographers, confession-mongers, and dealers in the curious shades of our private life. He it was who first turned from the contacts of men with men to their lonely life within. "The world that I regard is myself; it is the microcosm of my own frame that I cast mine eye on; for the other I use it but like my globe, and turn it round sometimes for my recreation".³³

I argue that Nash followed in Browne's footsteps. A close analysis of his illustrations for *Urne Buriall* and *The Garden of Cyrus* highlights how Browne guided Nash's application of both antiquity and abstraction. Like Browne's prose, Nash's treatment of ancient landscapes and his explorations into abstraction harboured immense egotism because, to paraphrase John Armstrong, everything Nash received was digested and reformed in the mould of his mind.³⁴

William Stukeley

Chapter two traces Nash's engagement with Avebury, which he first encountered in the summer of 1933 when he went on a respite holiday to Marlborough with his friend Ruth Clark. Nash had suffered a 'terrifying attack of asthma' in February that year, around the time he attempted to bring together a collection of disparate painters, sculptors and architects to form the contemporary art group Unit One.³⁵ Following David Mellor's suggestion, I argue that Avebury and Unit One were intimately connected in Nash's mind.³⁶ I argue that this connection is exemplified by Nash's definition of the latter's two pursuits:

First, the pursuit of form; the expression of the structural purpose in search of beauty in formal interaction and relations apart from representation. This is typified by abstract art. Second, the pursuit of the soul, the attempt to trace the 'psyche' in its devious flight, a psychological

³³ Woolf, 'The Elizabethan Lumber Room', 68.

³⁴ Armstrong, 'The Present Tendency of Paul Nash', 231.

³⁵ Typed Document with Autograph Annotations, 'Memoir of Paul Nash, 1913-1946' by Margaret Nash, ca. 1950, TGA 769/2/6, Paul Nash Collection, Tate Archive, London.

³⁶ Mellor, 'British Art in the 1930s: Some Economic, Political and Cultural Structures', 190.

research on the part of the artist parallel to the experiments of the great analysts. This is represented by the movement known as Surrealism.³⁷

The attempt to unite abstraction and surrealism proved difficult and Nash's wife Margaret noted that by the summer of 1933 her husband 'was far too exhausted from his recent experience at the clinic to take any further part in the cross-currents of those artistic politics'.³⁸ In order to recuperate his strength, Nash and Clark journeyed to Marlborough and visited the Avebury complex. This trip began Nash's significant engagement with the Neolithic stones, which continued until the early 1940s. I argue that this engagement would never have been so strong had Nash not received, as a gift from Claire Neilson, Stukeley's book *Abury* in 1934. Nash made numerous annotations throughout *Abury* that highlight his significant interest in Stukeley's work and where specifically this interest lay. He annotated two key aspects of the book. Firstly, Stukeley's accurate measurements of the site, specifically those that stressed its monumental structure. Perhaps inspired by *Abury*, Nash emphasised the site's architectural strength in an article called 'A Characteristic' (1937): 'This huge primitive complex, with its circles and avenues and its mighty gleaming pyramid of chalk, should have been one of the architectural wonders of the earth'.³⁹ Secondly, Nash heavily annotated Stukeley's comments on Avebury as a Druidic temple, particularly those that attributed the stones with a sense of animism.⁴⁰ From these notes one can trace Nash's claim that surrealism was native to Britain.⁴¹ I argue that Nash saw the two conflicting aspects he intended to resolve in Unit One, abstraction and surrealism, cohere in Stukeley's perception of Avebury. In Nash's mind Avebury became somehow emblematic of modern art in England and Stukeley was seen as a finer artistic comrade than many of his contemporaries at Unit One. Stukeley linked the Avebury complex to temples built by

³⁷ Nash, 'Unit One', 105.

³⁸ Typed Document with Autograph Annotations, 'Memoir of Paul Nash, 1913-1946' by Margaret Nash, ca. 1950, TGA 769/2/6, Paul Nash Collection, Tate Archive, London.

³⁹ Nash, 'A Characteristic', 135.

⁴⁰ Stukeley, *Abury: A Temple of the British Druids*, 16.

⁴¹ Nash, 'Surrealism and the Illustrated Book', 131.

Abraham in order to argue that Judeo-Christian monotheism had its origins in Britain.⁴² Stukeley represented Avebury as the bedrock of Christianity and Nash, following in his footsteps, represented Avebury as the cornerstone of British modernism. Both Stukeley and Nash adopted an achronic notion of time as they appropriated antiquity for their contemporary causes. This countered archaeology's chronologically progressive outlook, as demonstrated by W. F. Grimes' advocacy for the eventual, complete rediscovery of prehistory. Praising the accomplishments of The Earthworks Committee in 1935, Grimes stated:

The result has been a large body of material of very great value to the student of earthworks, which could hardly have been assembled by any single individual. The fact that the material does *not-as-yet-cover* [my italics] the whole country is obviously beside the point: in this incidental events have played their part. The work still goes on, and the influence of the Earthworks Committee is still strong.⁴³

Grimes urged current archaeologists to organise their finds, and for future archaeologists to fill-in the gaps, so that the catalogue of the past will eventually be completed. In opposition to Grimes, Browne and Stukeley worked within these gaps and filled them with contemporary musings on myth and religion. I argue that this encouraged Nash to appropriate the deep past for his own agenda. This thesis highlights the different historical approaches of Browne and Stukeley and explains how Nash utilised them at specific points in his career. I argue that Browne's contemplation of mortality and resurrection interested Nash in the early 1930s while he was dealing with the recent death of his father. By 1934, as Nash seemed more focused on promoting British modern art, Stukeley's elevation of Britain onto the international stage appealed.

Prehistoric Dorset

⁴² Stukeley and Gale, *The Family Memoirs of the Rev. William Stukeley, M.D. and the Antiquarian and Other Correspondence of William Stukeley, Roger and Samuel Gale*, 55.

⁴³ Grimes, 'Recent Books on British Archaeology', 430-1.

The third chapter examines Nash's increasing engagement with surrealism in the middle of the 1930s and considers how it helped shape his perception of Dorset's ancient landscape. Nash spent the summer of 1935 roaming the coastline, picking up an assortment of shells, stones and other found objects. Some of these were presented in a collage called *Swanage* (ca.1936, fig. 5), which included furzewood, driftwood and a dark piece of Kimmeridge rock. Nash endowed his objects with personalities, naming the furzewood 'Lon-gom-pa'. He claimed that 'you cannot look at 'Lon-gom-pa' and say he is no more than a piece of furze. No, he is a personality'.⁴⁴ Nash did precisely the same thing with the skeletons he encountered during Wheeler's 1934-7 excavations at Maiden Castle. Nash identified the human remains as moas, which are extinct, flightless birds originating from New Zealand.⁴⁵ Nash's obscure description countered Wheeler's treatment of the skeletons, which he left exposed at Maiden Castle as a tourist attraction. The skeletons gave the excavations an obvious human element, offering a point of contact for people attempting to engage with prehistory through archaeology. These excavations were largely funded by Wheeler's publicity of the site. Wheeler made the earthwork accessible to the public: 'The project was characterized by the attention that was paid to the promotion of the work through the media, and the emphasis placed on education and communication with the public through the provision of guides and the scale of interim reports, postcards and surplus slingstones'.⁴⁶ In contrast, Nash destroyed this accessibility by presenting Neolithic people as obscure and extinct bird-skeletons. In the surrealist manner, Nash re-imagined the familiar and made it alien as he described the skeletons as 'nests of giant birds; the gleaming skulls like clutches of monstrous eggs'.⁴⁷ Causey describes Nash's found objects:

Nash's concern with *objets trouvés* [found object] puts an alternative complexion on his intentions: they were personal to him, so that his discoveries and their forms often added to his personal mythology. One

⁴⁴ The Surrealist Object Explained, n.d., TGA 769/1/59-60, Paul Nash Collection, Tate Archive, London.

⁴⁵ Nash, 'Unseen Landscapes', 146.

⁴⁶ Cunliffe and Wainwright, 'Maiden Castle: Excavation, Education, Entertainment?', 97.

⁴⁷ Nash, 'Unseen Landscapes', 146.

returns to the fact of Nash as a private artist, or at the least as an artist constructing sequences of personal imagery – while supporting concepts of localism and Englishness through identification with historical places.⁴⁸

Nash's imaginative treatment of Maiden Castle contrasted the dry aspects of Wheeler's excavation reports. Nash positioned the deep past out of reach of the rational intellect and placed it somewhere within the mysterious world of the psyche. Causey states that Nash 'was absorbed by family and forefathers and, in his art, by the surviving monuments to England's long history; he was ready to commit these to the imagination, which meant more to Nash than their scientific reconstruction at the hands of archaeologists'.⁴⁹

Although Nash's aesthetic style changed throughout the 1930s, as abstraction abated and surrealism became more dominant, his response to the past maintained the immense egotism that I claim came partially from Browne and was reinforced by Stukeley. Until his death in 1946, Nash structured the past around sensibility rather than reason and ancient things remained symbols of his internal state of mind.

Ancient and Modern

I argue that Nash's connection with the deep past was both reactionary and radical. This split personality chimes with what Alexandra Harris describes as the 'Janus-faced decade' of the 1930s.⁵⁰ Modernity creeps into a large amount of Nash's work from this period, despite the fact that post-war paintings like *The Copse* (1919) and *Hill and Tree* (1919) offer a nostalgic vision of verdant countryside, thick with foliage that has been gently tamed by hedgerows and picket fencing. The rigid, mechanised landscapes that Nash had presented in war paintings like *Void* (1918, fig. 6) and *The Menin Road* (1918-9) subtly recur in works like *Places: 7 Prints Reproduced from Woodblocks* (1922): a series of wood engravings that incorporate formal aspects of modernism within a romantic landscape, causing nature to take on a jagged and hostile appearance. Nash exploits the

⁴⁸ Causey, *Paul Nash: Landscape and the Life of Objects*, 130.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 90.

⁵⁰ Harris, *Romantic Moderns*, 44.

rigid lines characteristic of wood engraving so that the trees in the engraving *Winter* (1921) point skywards in clean diagonal spears and the light of the sun shines sharply through diamond shaped clouds. Describing *Winter*, Nash claims that the ‘beech tree boughs are steel’.⁵¹ The simplicity of the engraving’s formal strength recalls something like the abstraction of David Bomberg’s *The Mud Bath* (1914), which presents a Jewish public bath in Whitechapel. Bomberg transformed the water into a bright red pattern and reduced human form to a series of blue and white geometric shapes. However, a key difference between *Mud Bath* and *Winter* is that Nash’s wood engraving is still very much an identifiable image of the British rural. Nash never went in fully for abstraction but, to borrow from David Peters Corbett, integrated modernity into the rural scene by using certain modernist techniques, such as the simplification of form, geometrical precision and a flattened picture plane.⁵² I examine the complex interplay between romanticism and modernity in Nash’s rural landscapes during the 1930s, particularly in those specifically ancient places. In the middle of the decade the architectural hardness of modernity infiltrates Neolithic Avebury in Nash’s oil painting *Equivalents for the Megaliths* (1935, fig. 7), which transforms the standing stones into cylinders and grids. This painting challenges conceptions that Nash’s approach to the past was purely nostalgic. *Equivalents for the Megaliths* demonstrates Nash’s appropriation, yet revision, of the traditions of British landscape painting. If we compare John Constable’s *Stonehenge* (ca.1836, fig. 8) with *Equivalents for the Megaliths*, which was painted almost one hundred years later, we notice a marked difference in the way that the two artists treated these Neolithic sites. Constable presents *Stonehenge* in its wild state, with rugged megaliths both standing and fallen. Between the dark blue storm clouds, shafts of sunlight accentuate the stones’ weathered appearance. In contrast, Nash’s sky is a rectangular strip of blue across the top of the painting. A spotlight picks out the smooth, angular features of the stones that, as stated, have been transformed into cylinders and grids. In the 1930s Nash often referenced, yet

⁵¹ Nash, ‘Winter’, 7.

⁵² Peters Corbett, “The Third Factor’: Modernity and the Absent City in the Work of Paul Nash, 1919-36’, 465.

radicalised, British painterly traditions and consequently Britain's most ancient landscapes.

This thesis illustrates how the radical aspects of Nash's 1930s work were gradually tempered by a nostalgic vision of the landscape that concludes with his return to the Wittenham Clumps in paintings like *Landscape of the Summer Solstice* (1943), *Landscape of the Vernal Equinox* (1943, fig. 9) and *Solstice of the Sunflower* (1945, fig. 10). Although aspects of Nash's modernist explorations shaped these paintings, they can be closely associated with a contemporary conservative celebration of British rural traditions. This celebration was prompted by industrial modernity's threat to the countryside in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The 1901 census established England and Wales as the world's first truly industrial nations, with seventy-seven percent of the population of the two countries living in urban areas and only twenty-three percent living in rural districts.⁵³ While the urban world took precedent, the economic and political importance of England and Wales decreased. Alun Howkins claims that in the mind of the British public these two changes were connected. Urbanisation became the scapegoat for decline, whereas national growth was situated in a revaluation of rural life. This concern continued throughout the First World War and, Howkins suggests, 'the rural ideal was enshrined by mass slaughter'.⁵⁴ This statement is inscribed in Nash's early post-war paintings, like *The Copse* and *Hill and Tree*. Peters Corbett explains how this work accorded with the common contemporary perception of nature as 'the repository of a 'true' way of life, of an authenticity of experience, which modernity was perceived to have abandoned'.⁵⁵ This perspective appears at its strongest in Nash's work at the end of the First World War and returns again during the Second World War with paintings like *Landscape of the Summer Solstice*, *Landscape of the Vernal Equinox* and *Landscape of the Crescent Moon* (1944). Just prior to the Second World War Nash anticipates this nostalgic return in

⁵³ Howkins, *The Death of Rural England: A Social History of the Countryside Since 1900*, 8.

⁵⁴ Howkins, 'The Discovery of Rural England', 80.

⁵⁵ Peters Corbett, 'The Third Factor: Modernity in the Work of Paul Nash', 1919-36', 459.

Outline, which describes his ancestral home in Langely, Berkshire. He writes: 'My first visit to my father's home had impressed me deeply. It was like finding my own home, my true home, for somehow it was far more convincing than our so-called home in London. I realised, without expressing the thought, that I belonged to the country'.⁵⁶ Causey claims that in 'relation to Nash it is striking that as he approaches the writing of *Outline*, his thoughts turn more to forebears and a feeling of continuity and the customary'.⁵⁷ Nash notes that there were records of his family living in Berkshire since the fifteenth century and his grandfather had been a yeoman farmer at Langley Rectory in the nineteenth century. Lamenting the recent dispersal of his family out of Langley, he nostalgically describes the village as an idyllic place: 'Now we have come to the path across the big field, known as the daisy hale, which runs past the honeysuckle arbour along by the quick set hedge above the close orchard. In the summer it divides the tall corn stalks threaded with poppies and marguerites. Now it traverses the plough where the green shoots are already pricking through'.⁵⁸ This scene constructs a strong image of an English summer in the reader's mind and Nash's close observation of the seasons can be related to those late nostalgic paintings.⁵⁹ Just as Nash describes the elemental aspects of an English summer in *Outline*, with the honeysuckle, corn stalks and poppies, he pinpoints a particular seasonal atmosphere in *Landscape of the Vernal Equinox*:

It is early spring. The woods are suffused with the red glow of the buds about to break. There is a beech hedge still in its winter leaf, pure light red or "rouge anglaise". The line of rose standards which have been neglected are full of ghostly lights touched on the right by the faint radiance of the rising moon.⁶⁰

The setting sun on the left casts a pinkish haze around the Wittenham Clumps, which are central to the painting. As Nash grows more nostalgic, Wittenham once again becomes

⁵⁶ Nash, *Outline: An Autobiography and Other Writings*, 46.

⁵⁷ Causey, *Paul Nash: Landscape and the Life of Objects*, 101.

⁵⁸ Nash, *Outline: An Autobiography and Other Writings*, 50.

⁵⁹ *Landscape of the Summer Solstice*, *Landscape of the Vernal Equinox* and *Landscape of the Crescent Moon*.

⁶⁰ Typed Document with Autograph Annotations for 'Landscape of the Vernal Equinox', 1943, TGA 769/1/39, Paul Nash Collection, Tate Archive, London.

an important landscape.⁶¹ In 1943 he discusses *Landscape of the Vernal Equinox* and the Clumps:

The design of the composition is largely determined by the important feature of the two central hills crowned with dome-like woods. There are the well-known Wittenham Clumps, part of the Berkshire Downs, an early British camp named Sinodun. Under the trees in the woods are long barrows. Below the Clumps are the remains of a very ancient forest said to retain much of its savagery and supposed to be still the haunt of pole-cats, badgers and other 'primitive' creatures. But apart from its legends the place, at least, for me, has had a compelling magic and mystery since I first knew it as a child. It stands for something very old and, in some sense, elemental in my mind. What better setting for a picture of the Vernal Equinox which in my imagination strikes a similar chord.⁶²

Paintings like *The Landscape of the Vernal Equinox* illustrate Nash's deep concern with nature, the soil and the seasons, which I claim underline a large majority of his work. I demonstrate how most of Nash's landscapes were, to some degree, shaped by his imagination of humankind's ancient connection with the rural landscape.

Literature Review

Nash's paintings became increasingly romantic in both style and subject matter as the 1930s progressed. This change has been observed partially through Causey's comprehensive monograph *Paul Nash* (1980). Causey's more recent book, *Paul Nash: Landscape and the Life of Objects* (2013), shaped the content of my argument more specifically through its chapters on *Urne Buriall* and *The Garden of Cyrus*, standing stones and Nash's surrealist perceptions of Dorset. I draw heavily on these three chapters, while undertaking extensive research into Browne, Stukeley and 1930s British archaeology in order to think in more detail about Nash's relationship to the deep past. Jemima Montagu's *Paul Nash: Modern Artist, Ancient Landscape* (2003), which was published to

⁶¹ The Clumps appear in the following late paintings: *Landscape of the Vernal Equinox*, *Landscape of the Summer Solstice*, *Landscape of the Moon's Last Phase* (1944) and *Solstice of the Sunflower*.

⁶² Typed Document with Autograph Annotations for 'Landscape of the Vernal Equinox', 1943, TGA 769/1/39, Paul Nash Collection, Tate Archive, London.

accompany an exhibition of the same title at the Tate Liverpool, has also heavily influenced my work. However, I extend the critical analysis and scholarly research of this necessarily limited catalogue. Montagu primarily focuses on Nash's sense of national identity. While nationality is an important aspect of my thesis, I am careful not to reduce Nash's work to a nostalgic search for Britishness. Montagu opens the catalogue with Nash's famous quote: 'Whether it is possible to 'go modern' and still 'be British' is a question vexing quite a few people today [...]. The battle lines have been drawn up: internationalism versus an indigenous culture; renovation versus conservatism; the industrial versus the pastoral; the functional versus the futile'.⁶³ Peters Corbett praises the 'well-chosen and wide-ranging exhibition', while criticising its emphasis on the divide between modernism and Britishness.⁶⁴ Although Montagu claims that Nash's vision was 'both ignited by his absorption of modernism and yet rooted in the ancient English past', she continually reiterates his interest in national heritage.⁶⁵ This bias is summed up by her statement that once 'he had freed himself from the shackles of pure abstraction and Surrealism, Nash was able to develop a unique form of expression which evolved out of, and yet has come to define, an idea of the English landscape'.⁶⁶ Peters Corbett accepts Montagu's claim, stating that Nash's art 'cannot be called modernist and is rarely even Surrealist in any convincing sense'.⁶⁷ However, he recognises that 'Nash drew on strands which have analogues in many other European cultures' and claims that to pinpoint Nash as either 'English' or 'British' is problematic.⁶⁸ In a similar manner to Peters Corbett, I stress Nash's idiosyncrasies and thereby argue that he cannot be placed comfortably on either side of the modernist/British divide. Chapter three emphasises Nash's pick-and-choose attitude towards the continental avant-garde and examines the way in which he blended it with British traditions in order to produce a vision of the landscape that was

⁶³ Nash, "'Going Modern" and "Being British"', 322-3.

⁶⁴ Peters Corbett, 'Paul Nash', 733-4.

⁶⁵ Montagu, 'Introduction', 9.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 20.

⁶⁷ Peters Corbett, 'Paul Nash', 734.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 735.

particular to him. Nash's places are coloured with, to paraphrase Woolf's description of Browne, the curious shades of his own private life.⁶⁹ In the words of Peters Corbett, Nash should be valued 'for something other than his attempts to 'go modern'. Not for 'being British' either, but for a persistent, personal vision'.⁷⁰

This thesis follows Harris' notion that Nash's focus on the British landscape was not necessarily a 'retreat from contemporary affairs' but perhaps a 'particular kind of locally orientated engagement'.⁷¹ Nash's perception of the landscape was shaped by his engagement with both British antiquarianism and his experiences of the continental avant-garde. This jumble of influences can be compared to the way that the Elizabethan age of exploration expanded the scope of Browne's imagination, and consequently filled his writing from floor to ceiling with ivory, iron, broken pots, urns and unicorns' horns.⁷² I catalogue a storehouse of artefacts acquired by Nash during the 1930s and consider how they shaped his changing approaches to the past. I conclude the thesis with Nash's return to the Wittenham Clumps in the 1940s and discuss how his perception of this ancient landscape had been altered by a decade of diverse discoveries. My work can be read in a similar light to Harris' *Romantic Moderns* (2010), which more broadly traces a generation of British artists and writers as they returned home from their continental excursions to 'see Stonage'.⁷³ I discuss Nash's changed perception of Wittenham to emphasise his subjective interpretation of the site, which is made even more evident by his increasing interest in myth. The result is an absolute rejection of archaeological practice. This contrasts my thesis with Kitty Hauser's informative book *Shadow Sites: Photography, Archaeology, and the British Landscape 1927-1955* (2007). Without directly referencing Hauser, I tacitly challenge her text, which traces the 'topophilia' of a generation of writers, artists and archaeologists who were fascinated with local landscapes

⁶⁹ Woolf, 'The Elizabethan Lumber Room', 68.

⁷⁰ Peters Corbett, 'Paul Nash', 735.

⁷¹ Harris, *Romantic Moderns*, 12.

⁷² Woolf, 'The Elizabethan Lumber Room', 71.

⁷³ Harris, *Romantic Moderns*, 14.

marked by time. Hauser outlines the way that Nash, and contemporaries like John Piper and Henry Moore, trawled the British landscape in search of remnants of the past. Hauser explains that their work was an exercise ‘of what we might call ‘the archaeological imagination’, where archaeology, being concerned with what remains of the past, might serve as a flexible analogy for both the literal and the metaphorical discovery of the past embedded in the British landscape’.⁷⁴ Hauser notes that for Nash, Piper and Moore, the landscape held faint traces of ancient stories. She claims that Nash appropriated the archaeological way of observing material remains of the past in the present: ‘The archaeological imagination does not reconstruct an absent past, but reveals a consciousness of the ineluctable and material immanence of the past within the present’.⁷⁵ Hauser illustrates her argument by drawing on Rudyard Kipling’s *Puck of Pook’s Hill* (1906):

See you the dimpled track that runs,
All hollow through the wheat?
O that was where they hauled the guns
That smote King Philip’s fleet.⁷⁶

Hauser argues that Nash’s imagination was structured around the material traces of the past in the present.⁷⁷ She analyses his article ‘Nest of the Wild Stones’ (1937), whereby Nash describes a cluster of stones he found on the Sussex Downland as birds: ‘Not even grosbeaks always, or comic birds like toucans, but partridges and landrails much more, and little pretty quails. Larks, even’.⁷⁸ Nash claims that he takes ownership of the stones as he transforms them: ‘so soon as *my* [my italics] stones came into *my* [my italics] hands their equation was solved and they were united for ever’.⁷⁹ In contrast, Hauser takes the stones out of Nash’s control and claims that they derive their significance ‘from the

⁷⁴ Hauser, *Shadow Sites: Photography, Archaeology, and the British Landscape 1927-1955*, 2.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 32.

⁷⁶ Kipling, *Puck of Pook’s Hill*, 1.

⁷⁷ Hauser, *Shadow Sites: Photography, Archaeology, and the British Landscape 1927-1955*, 8.

⁷⁸ Nash, ‘The Nest of the Wild Stones’, 142.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 143.

Sussex Downs where he found them ... ‘the painter’s object’ is an object in a landscape, mediated by history’.⁸⁰ In contrast to Hauser, I argue that Nash robs the object of its history as he transforms it into a product of his own imagination. He claims that ‘we may take the elements of Nature and make what we choose without reference to existing law and order, or even painting ‘as understood’’.⁸¹ Margaret Nash describes her husband’s approach: ‘It is the method of presentation in painting which is used by the artist when his vision penetrates through rather than remains imprisoned within his material object’.⁸² I admit that Nash had a keen topographical interest, but I argue that this was shaped around places that already harboured the symbols of his own subjective experience. Causey states: ‘Nash stressed that his art was subjective, and it was by discovering visual counterparts for personal feelings that his subjectivity was expressed’.⁸³

Christopher Green and Jens Daehner’s *Modern Antiquity: Picasso, de Chirico, Léger, Picabia* (2011) examines the continental avant-garde’s subjective perceptions of the past. It focuses on the way four continental modernists return to and reinvent antiquity between 1905-35. *Modern Antiquity* turned my attention to Christian Zervos’ *Cahiers d’art* (1926-60), which Nash had read.⁸⁴ Green highlights Zervos’ tendency to homogenise antiquity under the wide umbrella of modernism and promote a universal idea of art that spanned centuries.⁸⁵ In contrast, Picasso, de Chirico, Léger and Picabia present a fundamental break with the past that requires its transformation and reinvention. In accordance with these continental modernists, Nash’s paintings of ancient landscapes do not present a direct connection with the past. Christopher Neve states that ‘Nash’s places have in

⁸⁰ Hauser, *Shadow Sites: Photography, Archaeology, and the British Landscape 1927-1955*, 7-8.

⁸¹ Nash, ‘The Nest of the Wild Stones’, 143.

⁸² Nash, ‘Personal Portrait of Paul Nash’, 222.

⁸³ Causey, *Paul Nash: Landscape and the Life of Objects*, 7.

⁸⁴ Nash referenced *Cahiers d’art* in an article called ‘The Object’ (1936).

⁸⁵ Green, ‘“There is no Antiquity”: Modern Antiquity in the Work of Pablo Picasso, Giorgio De Chirico, Fernand Léger, and Francis Picabia (1906-36)’, 1-2.

common a dumb brightness and a sense of concealment'.⁸⁶ Neve describes how Nash had always painted the Wittenham Clumps from a distance and never exposed the secret that beneath the tree roots there might be remnants of an Iron Age fort, Roman pottery and Saxon bones.⁸⁷ Browne's similar sense of obscurity must have appealed to Nash as he read *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus*. I argue that Browne's text and Nash's Wittenham paintings 'marked the site of some event buried alive' and exhibited a breach with the past.⁸⁸ It must be noted that Nash was a city-born soldier of the First World War whose perceptions of the rural were most likely shaped by brutal experiences of modernity. As Ian Walker states, 'Nash knew that an understanding of nature in the twentieth century had to be profoundly acculturated'.⁸⁹ *Equivalents for the Megaliths* is a clear example of Nash's Janus-faced perspective on the rural. The modernist grid and ancient hill fort imply Nash's inability to dedicate his work to either tradition or modernism. Paul Hendon claims that the 'mystery of the stones is analogous to the mystery of the self that Nash pursued in his paintings and writing. The self of *Outline* refuses to be reconstructed into an orderly fleshed out portrait'.⁹⁰ In opposition to an archaeologist like Keiller, Nash had no intention of establishing a fixed identity for the stones. I quote Anthony Bertram to argue that this may have been because Nash was

acutely aware of the astonishing behaviour of space and time in our consciousness. As the past can become entangled in the present in uncoordinated fragments, and the future only appears to us as the expression of past and present, since we have no other knowledge of it; so space behaves erratically and objects in one space are liable to find themselves jostled into another.⁹¹

Inspired by Hendon, Neve and more generally Green, I argue that Nash had no desire to paint ancient places that fitted neatly within a chronological timeline. In contrast, these

⁸⁶ Neve, 'The Problem of Time: Paul Nash', 3.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 7.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Walker, *So Exotic, So Homemade: Surrealism, Englishness and Documentary Photography*, 49.

⁹⁰ Hendon, 'The Immortality of the 'I'', 608.

⁹¹ Bertram, *Paul Nash: The Portrait of an Artist*, 167.

were sites where past, present and future came together and both Nash's own identity and the character of the British landscape were brought into question.⁹²

⁹² Hendon, "The Immortality of the 'I'", 592.

Chapter One

The Interchange Between Browne and Nash

Browne, an early modern writer, and Nash, a twentieth-century painter working on the fringes of modernism, appear antithetical at first glance. I briefly draw upon Lytton Strachey's essay, 'Sir Thomas Browne' (1906), to summon a crisper image of the early modern writer from a twentieth-century perspective. According to Strachey, Browne's texts evoke the antique smell of a university library and are most suitably read amid learned walls, where his ornate prose extends along dark and studious cloisters.⁹³ In stark contrast, Nash's paintings from the early 1930s are perhaps most appropriately viewed within the clean, geometric interior of a contemporary Atlantic liner. Nash's trip aboard the RMS Mauretania in 1931 amplified the architectural strength of his work, which was at its peak around the time he illustrated Browne's essays. It is remarkable that two so seemingly different characters connect with such ease in the Cassell edition of *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus*. John Betjeman reviewed the book: 'The highest praise must go to Mr. Paul Nash, the pictorial expression of whose mind tallies so closely with the literary expressions of that Sir Thomas Browne'.⁹⁴ Browne and Nash are separated by three hundred years but the interchange between the former's baroque prose and the latter's clean, modern designs make them appear contemporaries. I examine this interchange and analyse what it reveals about the way both men approach antiquity.

'Urne Buriall' presents a highly imaginative approach to the past. Historical figures mingle with mythical ones, as Browne writes with equal sincerity of Moses, Archimedes, Achilles, Job, Hector, Charles the Fifth, Cardan, Alaric, Gordianus, Pilate, Homer, Cambyzes and the Canaanitish woman.⁹⁵ Browne's parade of characters anticipates the modernist tendency to blur historical sequence through anachronism and meld the mythic with the real. For example, the fantastic cast of Ezra Pound's exemplary

⁹³ Strachey, 'Sir Thomas Browne', 46.

⁹⁴ Betjeman, 'The Good Influence of Good Book Production', 77.

⁹⁵ Strachey, 'Sir Thomas Browne', 45.

modernist text, the *Cantos* (ca.1915-62), appear in a chronological jumble of the fictional and factual. Pound includes, seemingly as contemporaries, the figures of Thomas Jefferson, Homer, Edgar Degas, Dionysus, John Skelton, Tammuz, Genghis Khan and Zeus. Like Browne, modernists such as Pound play fast and loose with their historical sources. The synchronicity of what are, apparently, distinct historical events and figures in Pound's poetry suggest a very different conception of historical time to that which govern the chronological progression of modernity. This is perhaps because modernism sought, by an imaginative engagement with the archaeological, the mythic and the prehistoric, to leap back over the Christian era of western culture to find deeper roots for a secular modernity.⁹⁶ P. Morton Shand recognises modernism's turn towards the deep past as it searched for a purer perception of the world:

The revulsion from figurative art that has resulted is producing a kind of throw-back to a less sophisticated and more elemental approach to natural forms among modern painters, many of whom have rapidly passed from a half-amused interest in shapes hitherto rejected out of hand to their enthusiastic acceptance. Now that we have learned to set less store on intellect and more on intuition, seeing no longer necessarily implies being either able or wishful to understand. Natural 'elective affinities' and imaginatively existing plastic relationships have superseded the old gold-washers' process of sieving beauty through a mesh of academic shibboleths.

Another factor that has limited the range of perception has been the centuries old interaction of religion and art. Christianity has had the effect of dimming our visual alertness to the symbols of older religions. A striking example was the transformation of Pan into the Devil, and of 'groves' and wilderness from being associated with Pagan beauty into haunts of evil. Many centuries elapsed before painters ventured, or succeeded in persuading their public, to look at landscape for its own sake. But although the Early Fathers destroyed or transformed all the pagan shrines and monuments they could, the subconscious memory of the appeal these once evoked has obstinately survived. There is a far more cogent reason for this than the proverbial conservatism of rural populations. All the primitive cults identified natural phenomenon with

⁹⁶ Gere, *Knossos and the Prophets of Modernism*, 7.

certain recurrent forms in Nature, whereas preoccupation with the soul's salvation kept the early church severely aloof from the soil and seasons.⁹⁷

Shand recognises how modernists look to the past in search of a purer, universal understanding of the world, which modernity was thought to conceal. Browne makes a similar turn backwards in 'Urne Buriall', as he looks to the past for a sign of something transcendent rather than temporal. Through Browne, Nash counters the causal narrative of modernity to concern himself with a panoramic, yet profound, vision of mankind. Both Browne and Nash develop this vision through ancient myth, which engenders a far more expansive viewpoint on the past through its embrace of what is speculative, irrational and contradictory.

Thomas Browne

Browne was an exemplary seventeenth-century polymath; he was a writer of prose, a moralist, a physician and a philosopher. Born in London in 1605 and educated at Winchester and Oxford, he spent three years studying medicine and was awarded the university's MD in 1633. In 1636 Browne settled in Norwich, where he practised as a physician for the rest of his life. His writings were diverse and his essays combined scientific knowledge with religious and philosophical ideas. Samuel Johnson understood 'Urne Buriall' as an antiquarian study.⁹⁸ Indeed, Browne's text was considered a foundational monument for English archaeology.⁹⁹ However, the text posed questions that the antiquarian could not answer, such as: 'Who knows the fate of his bones, or how often he is to be buried? Who hath the oracle of his ashes, or whether they are to be scattered?'¹⁰⁰ Sir Edmund Gosse commented that 'to go to Browne's book for plain archaeological statement would indeed be like applying to a gin-shop for a shoulder of

⁹⁷ Press Cutting from *Country Life* Magazine: 'Object and Landscape' by P. Morton Shand, 1939, TGA 769/9/5, Paul Nash Collection, Tate Archive, London.

⁹⁸ Samuel Johnson called 'Urne Buriall' a 'treatise of antiquity'. Johnson, 'Introduction', xxx.

⁹⁹ Williams, 'Remains of Pagan Saxondom?: The Study of Anglo-Saxon Cremation Rites', 47.

¹⁰⁰ Browne, *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus ... with Thirty Drawings by Paul Nash. Edited with an Introduction by John Carter*, 3.

mutton'.¹⁰¹ It can be assumed that Browne's subjective treatment of the past appealed to an artist like Nash, whose engagement with proto-archaeological and archaeological material was also unconventional. Conventionally, the early twentieth-century archaeological discipline treated the past as a causal sequence of events that could be rationally analysed. Such treatment positioned the past at an irrevocable distance from the living present. Antiquarianism, as proto-archaeological research, mostly treated the past in the same manner. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries antiquarianism was primarily practiced by wealthy enthusiasts, who examined ancient field monuments to gain information about their heritage. Prominent antiquarians, such as William Camden, dismissed the urns that Browne took for his subject because they lacked any inscriptions or coins that might accurately date them. Phillip Schwyzer claims that the 'problem with the urns was that they bore no message whatsoever, at least not in a sense accessible to the seventeenth-century antiquarian mind'.¹⁰² Browne recognised this when he wrote that the urns 'arose as they lay, almost in silence among us'.¹⁰³ Unable to date the urns, Browne misidentified them as Roman when in fact they were Saxon. This error removed the urns from seventeenth-century debates surrounding England's Anglo-Saxon heritage. If the urns, and the human remains they contained, were Roman then they had no genetic relation to the inhabitants of England. Browne explained that when 'the bones of King Arthur were digged up, the old race might think, they beheld therein some Originals of themselves; Unto these of our Urnes none here can pretend relation'.¹⁰⁴ Browne was living in the aftermath of the Reformation, which witnessed a move away from Catholicism to an earlier, 'purer' interpretation of Christ's teaching. In consequence, the Anglican Church was looking back to a time before Augustine came to England and converted the Anglo-Saxons to Roman Catholicism. If the urns were deemed to be pre-conversion Anglo-Saxon then Browne's investigations would be overshadowed with

¹⁰¹ Gosse, 'Urn-Burial and Garden of Cyrus', 113.

¹⁰² Schwyzer, 'Readers of the Lost Urns: Desire and Disintegration in Thomas Browne's *Urn Burial*', 180.

¹⁰³ Browne, *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus ... with Thirty Drawings by Paul Nash. Edited with an Introduction by John Carter*, 4.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

claims of religious and racial authenticity. Schwyzer argues that Browne's misidentification of the urns was indicative of his underlying agenda.¹⁰⁵ By identifying the urns as Roman, Browne was able to distance his work from nationalism and current religious debates. This allowed him to focus on irretrievable aspects of the past, which required a person to fill in the gaps with his or her own imagination. Schwyzer points out that 'Browne's place in archaeological history owes less to his antiquarian erudition than to his sensitivity to the subtle dialectic of silence and desire'.¹⁰⁶ Browne was not concerned with establishing a lineage for the urns. His dedication to Thomas Le Gros stated: 'In the offer of these Antiquaries we drive not at ancient Families, so long outlasted by them; We are farre from erecting your worth upon the pillars of your Forefathers, whose merits you illustrate'.¹⁰⁷ Marjorie Swann observes that instead of celebrating Le Gros' genteel lineage, Browne praised the man's character: 'I look upon you as a Gemme of the Old Rock'.¹⁰⁸ Swann notes:

Browne's marginal gloss on the term 'Old Rock', *Adamas de rupe veteri praestantissimus* ('The most outstanding diamond comes from ancient rock'), seems also to refer punningly to Le Gros's relationship to Adam, the pedigree-free father of the human race. Thus even as Browne dedicates his work to a royalist gentleman, he minimizes the importance of Le Gros's inherited status and emphasizes instead Le Gros's unassuming recognition of his shared humanity.¹⁰⁹

Browne used the past to speak of transcendent, rather than temporal, issues. Instead of approaching Browne as an antiquarian, Gosse suggested that one should read him like one would 'the rhapsody of some great poet, to be borne along on the wind of his imaginative status'.¹¹⁰ Browne's idiosyncratic, achronic approach to the past made it difficult to position him comfortably within antiquarianism. In his dedication Browne

¹⁰⁵ Schwyzer, 'Readers of the Lost Urns: Desire and Disintegration in Thomas Browne's *Urn Burial*', 187.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 180.

¹⁰⁷ Browne, *Urn Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus ... with Thirty Drawings by Paul Nash. Edited with an Introduction by John Carter*, 5.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Swann, *Curiosities and Texts: The Culture of Collecting in Early Modern England*, 128.

¹¹⁰ Gosse, 'Urn-Burial and Garden of Cyrus', 109.

stated that he was not interested in the urns because of their age but because they had been recently discovered: 'We are hinted by the occasion, not caught the opportunity to write of old things, or intrude upon the Antiquary'.¹¹¹ This suggests that Browne examined the urns to promote his own current philosophical ideas rather than to investigate the past. Later in the chapter I demonstrate how Nash similarly used the illustrations for *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus* to develop aspects of his own artistic practice and thought.

According to Causey, Nash was interested in 'Urne Buriall' and 'The Garden of Cyrus' essays for 'several years and had considered them with his friend John Carter, who edited the new edition'.¹¹² In a letter to Gordon Bottomley from the 28th December 1930 Nash wrote: 'I am just starting a glorious task - the production of an illustrated Sir Thomas Browne's *Urne Buriall and Garden of Cyrus* – thirty drawings and a cover design. Rather the opportunity for something don't you think?'¹¹³ Nash spent most of 1931 working on the book. After its completion Desmond Flowers, head of the publishing house Cassell, wrote to Nash commending him on his work: 'I think you have made a magnificent job of it. The book is a great credit to this house'.¹¹⁴ Edward McKnight Kauffer similarly praised the book, writing to Nash shortly after its publication: '*Urne Buriall* is I think the best illustrated book done in England. Hats off to you! But oh my God the price'.¹¹⁵ *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus* was priced at £15, 15s because of the high quality reproductions of Nash's illustrations, along with the book's luxury

¹¹¹ Browne, *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus ... with Thirty Drawings by Paul Nash. Edited with an Introduction by John Carter*, 4.

¹¹² Causey, *Paul Nash*, 221.

¹¹³ Nash, 'Letter 204', 203.

¹¹⁴ Two Typed Letters from Desmond and Newman Flower to Paul Nash, 1930-1934, TGA 7050/260-2, Paul Nash Collection, Tate Archive, London.

¹¹⁵ Letters from E. McKnight Kauffer to Paul Nash, 1925-1932, TGA 8313/1/2/109-10, Paul Nash Collection, Tate Archive, London.

materials.¹¹⁶ Although specifically targeted at the fine book collectors' market, this was expensive, especially during a period of severe economic crisis.¹¹⁷ Despite the book's positive reception, its price crippled sales. Only the first eighty-five copies were initially bound. Due to lack of sales, illustrations from many of the surviving unbound copies were divided up and sold individually. While there has been close analysis of some of Nash's individual illustrations for *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus*, the book as a whole has received little scholarly attention.¹¹⁸ However, an examination of the engagement between Nash's illustrations and Browne's text highlights an interesting interchange between life and death in the work of both artists. This interchange undercuts the perceived mordancy of Nash's work from the late 1920s and early 1930s, as occasionally presented by Mary Beal, Causey and James King.¹¹⁹ Both Nash and Browne jumbled linear chronological narrative so that, to quote Browne, 'the eldest parcels are young, and earth it self an Infant'.¹²⁰ Through close analysis of the relationship between text and image in *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus*, I demonstrate how Browne and Nash presented a transhistorical approach to antiquity, whereby the past repeatedly underwent rebirth.

Form Out of Void

Browne's two essays have contrasting subject matters. 'Urne Buriall' describes a seventeenth-century proto-archaeological excavation at Walsingham in Norfolk. The dig uncovered forty to fifty urns that Browne identified as Roman. The essay centres on

¹¹⁶ *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus* (1932) was printed on handmade paper. The binding was in ivory and morocco vellum tooled with gold.

¹¹⁷ In 1932 the weekly wage of a skilled man was between £3 and £3, 10s.

¹¹⁸ Close readings of Nash's illustrations for *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus* include Beal, 'For the Fallen: Paul Nash's Landscape at Iden', 19-23; Brockbank, 'Browne and Nash: The Genesis of Form', 115-31; Causey, *Paul Nash: Landscape and the Life of Objects*, 86-97. Brockbank's text is the only one dedicated solely to an examination of Nash's illustrations.

¹¹⁹ Beal, 'For the Fallen: Paul Nash's Landscape at Iden', 19-23; Causey, *Paul Nash*, 171-4; King, *Interior Landscapes: A Life of Paul Nash*, 127.

¹²⁰ Browne, *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus ... with Thirty Drawings by Paul Nash. Edited with an Introduction by John Carter*, 4.

conceptions of death and criticises historical attempts to immortalise oneself in urns and monuments. ‘The Garden of Cyrus’ has a seemingly unrelated subject matter. Its central figure is the King of Persia, Cyrus the Great, who is said to have cultivated the first gardens. ‘The Garden of Cyrus’ examines the ancient method of planting trees by fives in the shape of the quincunx.¹²¹ This method allows the roots the most efficient use of earth for nourishment and the branches the most efficient use of space for sunshine. Browne considers the systematic ordering of the quincuncial orchard to be a reflection of God and his everlasting presence within nature. ‘Urne Buriall’ and ‘The Garden of Cyrus’ were first printed together by the author in 1658 and until the nineteenth century they were never published apart. Browne was criticised by later commentators for combining these seemingly disparate essays. Gosse claims that Browne connected the essays for typographical utility because ‘Urne Buriall’ was too short to be published alone.¹²² Philip Brockbank notes the divergence between the two books by referring to ‘Urne Buriall’ as the ‘book of death’ and ‘The Garden of Cyrus’ as the ‘book of life’.¹²³ The former text has often been celebrated, while the latter has often been criticised. For example, Johnson praises ‘Urne Buriall’ as the best example of the breadth of Browne’s reading and memory, yet describes ‘The Garden of Cyrus’ as little more than a ‘sport of fancy’.¹²⁴ Although ‘The Garden of Cyrus’ was generally understood as the less important of the two essays, its content, the reflection of God in the quincuncial orchard, was close to Browne’s heart. The verdant state of nature can be understood as a place of sanctity for Browne. He was a doctor in a city suffering bouts of plague and smallpox and often sent his family to live in the country while he tended to the sick. Similarly, Nash was living with a life-threatening illness and when his asthma was bad retreated from London to the country because the city air aggravated his breathing. Both men found solace in nature, which held the promise of new life. ‘The Garden of Cyrus’ was therefore the necessary

¹²¹ The quincunx is a geometric pattern comprised of five points that form a cross. Four of the points form the corners of a square, with the fifth point situated in the middle of the square.

¹²² Gosse, ‘Urn-Burial and Garden of Cyrus’, 121.

¹²³ Brockbank, ‘Browne and Nash: The Genesis of Form’, 119.

¹²⁴ Johnson, ‘Introduction’, xxix and xxxiv.

antidote to the morbidity of 'Urne Buriall'. As Leonard Nathanson says: 'In the role of antiquary Browne exposes the frailty of human custom to his better self, Browne the scientific student of nature'.¹²⁵ The close relationship between 'Urne Buriall' and 'The Garden of Cyrus' demonstrates that death comes with resurrection and likewise resurrection cannot come without death. Browne states that: 'Darknesse and light hold interchangeable dominions, and alternately rule the seminal state of things'.¹²⁶ *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus* highlights an intimate interchange between life and death in the work of both Browne and Nash. 'Urne Buriall' represents a subject by which both men were plagued and, because of this, 'The Garden of Cyrus' represents a subject matter to which they were devoted. Following in the footsteps of Nathanson and Causey, I argue that these essays form 'two parts of an encompassing vision'.¹²⁷ I propose that Nash's illustrations for *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus* draw on the implicit connections between Browne's two essays and unite them irrefutably. 'Urne Buriall' provides Nash with an outlet for his preoccupation with death, which had grown since his father died in 1929. 'The Garden of Cyrus' allows him to pursue his interest in the formal structure of the landscape, primarily through geometric patterns in nature. His illustrations combine the mordant corporeality of the first essay with the perfected landscape of the second. This cross-fertilisation of ideas reinforces a recurring association in Nash's painting between death and regeneration within the landscape, especially the orchard.¹²⁸ The illustrations for *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus* refute the morbid interpretation of the orchard as simply a site of death in Nash's work. By merging the themes of Browne's two essays, Nash approaches the orchard as both a place of death and regeneration.

¹²⁵ Nathanson, *The Strategy of Truth: A Study of Sir Thomas Browne*, 188.

¹²⁶ Browne, *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus ... with Thirty Drawings by Paul Nash. Edited with an Introduction by John Carter*, 110.

¹²⁷ Nathanson, *The Strategy of Truth: A Study of Sir Thomas Browne*, 178; Causey, *Paul Nash: Landscape and the Life of Objects*, 89-90.

¹²⁸ *Landscape at Iden* (1929), *Month of March* (1929).

Brockbank explores this idea and recognises Browne's 'preoccupation with the generation of form out of void, of order out of decay, of life out of death'.¹²⁹

As a faithful Christian, Browne's philosophy was directed by his religious belief in the Creator's immense production of form out of nothing. In *Religio Medici* Browne stated: 'God, being all things, is contrary unto nothing, out of which were made all things, and so nothing became something, and omneity informed nullity into an essence'.¹³⁰

Brockbank argues that the preoccupation with form out of void was influenced by the destruction surrounding Browne.¹³¹ During Browne's lifetime, both Britain and Western Europe went through a series of major conflicts in the form of the English Civil War and the Thirty Years War. Hugh Trevor Roper claims that the irrevocable shattering of the monarchical order generated a 'decisive breach in historical continuity'.¹³² Trevor Roper describes the revolutions as a sequence of rainstorms that intellectually, politically and morally changed Europe's climate and charged the continent with an 'undefined sense of gloom'.¹³³ Geoffrey Parker and Lesley Smith note how a significant number of English people, beyond those directly related to revolutionary practice, were acutely aware of the crisis.¹³⁴ Parker quotes the writings of Ralph Josselin, a vicar from the village of Earls Colne in Essex, from January 1652:

France is likely to fall into flames by her owne divisions; this summer shee hath done nothing abroad. The Spaniard hath almost reduced Barcelona ... Poland is free from warre with the Cossacks but feareth them. Dane and Suede are both quiet, and so is Germany, yet the peace at Munster is not fully executed.¹³⁵

Josselin demonstrated the speed with which the news of revolution abroad reached even

¹²⁹ Brockbank, 'Browne and Nash: The Genesis of Form', 117.

¹³⁰ Browne, 'Religio Medici', 65.

¹³¹ Brockbank, 'Browne and Nash: The Genesis of Form', 116.

¹³² Trevor Roper, 'The General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century', 33.

¹³³ Ibid., 31.

¹³⁴ Parker and Smith, 'Introduction', 1.

¹³⁵ Josselin, *The Diary of Ralph Josselin: 1616-1683*, 269-70.

small communities in England. Therefore, a learned man like Browne, living in the major city of Norwich, would have been deeply aware of the violence currently charging through Western Europe. As the old systems collapsed around him, Browne was enveloped in an atmosphere of destruction. To some degree Browne's situation paralleled Nash's experience in Western Europe during the First World War. In 1914 Nash enlisted as a private in the Artists' Rifles, was promoted to First Lieutenant and, injured in the Ypres Salient in May 1917, returned to the front five months later as an official war artist. Before his injury, Nash's time at Ypres was relatively quiet. However, he returned in October to find the Salient being devastated by the Third Battle of Ypres, or Passchendaele, which finished a week after Nash arrived. He recalled the violence in a letter to his wife: 'They [shells] alone plunge overhead, tearing away the rotting tree stumps, breaking the plank roads, striking down horses and mules, annihilating, maiming, maddening, they plunge into the grave which is this land; one huge grave, and cast upon it the poor dead. It is unspeakable, godless, hopeless'.¹³⁶ Nash regularly associated the word 'void' with the destruction of war. His major exhibition of war paintings at the Leicester Galleries in 1918 was called *Void of War* and *Void* (1918) was the title of Nash's striking oil painting depicting the aftermath of the Battle of Passchendaele. *Void* presents a dense composition of duckboards, abandoned rifles and fences which all jolt diagonally out of the mud. Rain pours overhead and in the distance an aeroplane attack continues the conflict. *Void* portrays absolute destruction and, as Causey suggests, it is 'the nearest thing in Nash's work to a statement of hopelessness'.¹³⁷ Causey points out that the paintings Nash produced after the Battle of Passchendaele contained none of the 'quick rejuvenation' promised in his early war paintings, such as *Chaos Decoratif* (1917) or *Wytschaete Woods* (1917).¹³⁸ From November 1917 onwards Nash's war landscapes depicted utter devastation. However, some of the paintings' titles still upheld an element of hope, such as *Dawn. Sanctuary Wood from Stirling Castle* (1917) and *Sunrise. Inverness Copse*

¹³⁶ Nash, *Outline: An Autobiography and Other Writings*, 211.

¹³⁷ Causey, *Paul Nash*, 77.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 71.

(1917). Causey notes that by giving the place name and the time of day as the title Nash contrasted the destruction of specific sites with cyclical patterns of nature.¹³⁹ Although war destroyed the individuality of these places, the earth's revolution around the sun maintained a promise of change and renewal.¹⁴⁰ This cyclical pattern was integral to *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus*, as demonstrated by the decay in the first essay flourishing into fertility in the second. Browne closed his second essay with a question on regeneration, which ended his discourse on a positive note and also pointed it towards future debate: 'But who can be drowsie at that howr which freed us from everlasting sleep? Or have slumbering thoughts at that time, when sleep it self must end, and as some conjecture all shall awake again?'¹⁴¹

Art as play

Browne and Nash presented death and regeneration in universal rather than individual terms. While Nash's war paintings focused on the devastation of nature, Browne discussed funerary habits across continents and centuries. As Strachey points out, Browne dealt with 'mortality in its most generalised aspect'.¹⁴² While Strachey believes this brought out Browne's strongest talents, other scholars criticise his inclusivity.¹⁴³ Stanley Fish attacks *Religio Medici* for trying to unite a disparate world through belief in a universal God.¹⁴⁴ For the seventeenth-century reader Browne's attempt at unification must have struck a sharp contrast to the wars that were violently dividing Europe. Fish notes that 'so generous and assimilative is his [Browne's] nature ... he is finally distinguishable only by a distinction-effacing tolerance'.¹⁴⁵ Browne denied the differences between nations and religions and thereby avoided taking a political or social

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Browne, *Urne Buriall and the Garden of Cyrus ... with Thirty Drawings by Paul Nash. Edited with an Introduction by John Carter*, 122.

¹⁴² Strachey, 'Sir Thomas Browne', 45.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Fish, 'The Bad Physician: The Case of Sir Thomas Browne', 358.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

stance. This neutrality caused Browne to be viewed as a non-committed bourgeois, whose privileged position in society made him politically complacent.¹⁴⁶ Brockbank claimed that Browne's 'prose can be said to afford solace to an educated reader of the middle station, neither ambitious for the extravagant, or magnanimous, life of the patrician landowner, nor preoccupied with the ordeals of the poor'.¹⁴⁷ However, Browne's reluctance to provide much commentary on the Civil War, or politics in general, may have been because he held Royalist sympathies in Norwich, which was predominantly Parliamentary. Brockbank claims that Browne's disengagement with politics was a matter of maintaining distance from its destructive potential. Brockbank suggests that Browne and Nash developed a transhistorical spirit, which spanned centuries and disregarded the limits of contemporary thought in the service of more timeless ideas on death and regeneration.¹⁴⁸ This transhistorical spirit is represented in Nash's 'Urne Buriall' illustration, *Sorrow* (fig. 11), which presents a row of broken columns that symbolise life cut short. The ghostly figure floating above the pillars has Nash's dark hair, leading the viewer to assume that this illustration is a self-portrait that anticipates the artist's death and subsequent resurrection. The ribbons encircling the broken columns allude to eternity and thereby reinforce the sense of resurrection. The figure gravitates towards the sun, which is the symbol of immortality. The mask on the floor suggests that the soul has left its earthly identity behind in search of transcendent, solar perfection. The geometric radiation of light from the sun does not touch the broken pillars, which act as memorials for the earthly self. Instead the sun reaches the torn branch and wreath, suggesting that immortality on earth only resides in natural things. As Browne described it, nature is 'perpetually verdant' and is the true, yet nameless, monument to immortality on earth.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Brockbank, 'Browne and Nash: The Genesis of Form', 116.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Brockbank closes his essay: 'If his [Browne's and to an extent Nash's] sense of the splendors and ironies of human endeavor within the great circle of mortality can help us to keep going for another three hundred years, so much the better. The point is not, to get to the end; the point is, not to get to the end'. Ibid., 131.

¹⁴⁹ Browne, *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus ... with Thirty Drawings by Paul Nash. Edited with an Introduction by John Carter*, 38.

Nature, like Browne's urns, bears no inscription of ownership but is a communal monument to life. I argue that both Browne and Nash were interested in collective ideas of death and resurrection. Browne closed 'The Garden of Cyrus' with a statement that swept over continents and centuries to rest on the prospective resurrection of humanity as a whole:

To keep our eyes open longer were but to act our *Antipodes*. The Huntsmen are up in *America*, and they are already past their first sleep in *Persia*. But who can be drowsy at that howr which freed us from everlasting sleep? Or have slumbering thoughts at that time, when sleep it self must end, and as some conjecture all shall awake again?¹⁵⁰

The optimism expressed in this passage underlies the whole of *Urne Buriall* and *The Garden of Cyrus*. Constantinos Patrides remarks that for a text devoted to funerary habits, 'Urne Buriall' does not display a strong necrological obsession. He writes: 'Oddly enough the tone of *Hydriotaphia* ['Urne Buriall'] is not even remotely lugubrious, nor even – if one dares to use the word in this context – grave'.¹⁵¹ Patrides highlights how the playful and the solemn were essential aspects of Browne's rhetoric and readily converged in his prose. Browne's playfulness was demonstrated most clearly elsewhere, in the short text called *Musæum Clausum, or Bibliotheca Abscondita: Containing Some Remarkable Books, Antiquities, Pictures and Rarities of Several Kinds, Scarce or Never Seen by Any Man Now Living* (1684). *Musæum Clausum* is a catalogue of books, pictures and antiquities that appear thoroughly fantastic. Browne's inventory seems to parody the popular, seventeenth-century tendency to accumulate man-made and natural objects into museums or cabinets of curiosities. Browne reminded the reader that there were many collections of this kind in Europe and listed 'the Musæum Aldrovandi, Calceolarianum, Moscardi, Wormianum; the *Casa Abbellita* at Loretto, and 'Tresor of St. Dennis'.¹⁵² In the seventeenth century museums were established by wealthy families, enthusiasts and institutions, whose

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 122.

¹⁵¹ Patrides, 'The Best Part of Nothing: Sir Thomas Browne and the Strategy of Indirection', 34.

¹⁵² Browne, 'Musæum Clausum, Or Bibliotheca Abscondita: Containing Some Remarkable Books, Antiquities, Pictures and Rarities of Several Kinds, Scarce Or Never Seen by Any Man Now Living', 267.

collections contained disparate material that, when displayed together, symbolised the cosmos and consequently the owner's knowledge of the universe. Browne appeared to be poking fun at these collections. For example, entry twelve in the section for 'Antiquities and Rarities of Several Sorts' recorded this fantastical item: 'The skin of a snake bred out on the spinal marrow of a man'.¹⁵³ Rather than broaden the reader's knowledge of literature, art and antiquity, Browne's inventory did more to excite the imagination. Browne's discussion of antiquities in 'Urne Buriall' was similarly imaginative rather than informative and its likeness to *Musæum Clausum* highlights its inherently absurd character. Patrides argues that *Musæum Clausum* formed part of the seventeenth-century custom of 'art as play' or the playfulness of the logos. He quotes Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians to demonstrate that the purpose of this playfulness was to challenge the righteousness of wisdom: 'God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise'.¹⁵⁴ Just as *Musæum Clausum* can be read as a satire of the accumulation of world knowledge, 'Urne Buriall' can be read more specifically as a satire of antiquarian studies. Patrides calls 'Urne Buriall' an 'improbable discourse', which from the outset deviates significantly from its full title – 'A Discourse of the Sepulchrall Urnes lately found in Norfolk'.¹⁵⁵ Browne only examines the Walsingham urns in chapter two of 'Urne Buriall' and is otherwise preoccupied with a discussion of funerary rites in general. Reid Barbour suggests that at the heart of Browne's text is the message that 'ceremony and the 'sensible rhetoric' of the dead are as corrupt as they are accommodating'.¹⁵⁶ On the other hand, Browne also emphasises that 'there is no point in pretending that we can shoulder the 'heaviest stone' of our mortality without their assistance'.¹⁵⁷ Browne's relationship to memorial is complicated. Barbour highlights how the marginal notes to 'Urne Buriall' are 'filled with the names of Browne's honorable friends, correspondents, and neighbors, as

¹⁵³ Ibid., 276.

¹⁵⁴ 1 Cor. 1:27 (King James).

¹⁵⁵ Browne, *Hydriotaphia: Urn Burial*, 9.

¹⁵⁶ Barbour, *Sir Thomas Browne: A Life*, 353.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

though he were attempting to preserve their names even as he was casting doubt on the possibility of such preservation'.¹⁵⁸

Browne's dual approach to memorials is demonstrated in his posthumously published antiquarian survey of the monuments in Norwich Cathedral called *Repertorium* (1712). Browne spent almost twenty years on the survey and he worked hard to restore, with words, the memorials that had been attacked and threatened by iconoclasm during the recent civil war. Browne highlights the difficulty of such an aim when he emphasises the potential fallibility of the oral tradition upon which a great deal of his text is based: 'Mr. John Sandlin, one of the choir, who lived eighty-nine years; and, as *I remember, told me* [my italics] that he was a chorister in the reign of Queen Elizabeth'.¹⁵⁹ Barbour notes that on 'occasion, the quick repetition of the phrase 'is said' serves as a reminder that the oral tradition, while precious, can also be tenuous. If the civil war is responsible for senseless violence and rapine, it also strikes Browne as the source of 'confusion'.¹⁶⁰ *Repertorium* suggests the irrevocable loss of things past and repeatedly evokes a sense of oblivion. Browne writes that in 'the late times the grate was taken away, the statue broke, and the free-stone pulled down as far as the inward brick-work; which being unsightly was afterwards taken away, and the space between the pillars left void, as it now remaineth'.¹⁶¹ However, as Jonathan Post remarks, despite Browne's focus on oblivion, '*Repertorium* cumulatively resists, even as it punctiliously records, efforts to turn the cathedral into a blank space'.¹⁶² In a footnote Browne brings the Cathedral to life as he quotes a vivid description of its state under Parliamentary occupation:

what clattering of glasses, what beating down of walls, what tearing down
of monuments, what pulling down of seats, and wrestling out of irons and

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Browne, 'Repertorium: Or Some Account of the Tombs and Monuments in the Cathedral Church of Norwich', 279.

¹⁶⁰ Barbour, *Sir Thomas Browne: A Life*, 450.

¹⁶¹ Browne, 'Repertorium: Or Some Account of the Tombs and Monuments in the Cathedral Church of Norwich', 281.

¹⁶² Post, 'Miscellaneous Browne Among the Tombs of Norwich Cathedral', 266.

brass from the windows and graves; what defacing of arms, what demolishing of curious stone-work, that had not any representation in the world, but of the cost of the founder and skill of the mason; what piping on the destroyed organ pipes; vestments, both copes and surplices, together with the leaden cross, which had been newly sawed down from over the greenyard pulpit, and the singing books and service books were carried to the fire in the public market-place; a lewd wretch walking before the train in his cope trailing in the dirt, with a service book in his hand, imitating, in an impious scorn, the tune, and usurping the words of the litany, the ordnance being discharged on the Guild-day, the cathedral was filled with musketeers, drinking and tobacconing as freely as it had turned alehouse.¹⁶³

Barbour states that 'Browne bestowed on his work the powerful sense that, far from ossified markers of status, the monuments and tombs of the cathedral activated in the visitor to the cathedral the living experience of space and time'.¹⁶⁴ Post promotes *Repertorium* as more of a travel guide than a memorial and claims that Browne's sense of the Cathedral is 'spatially elastic and personal, subject, that is, to individual perspective; less focused, as it were, on the cathedral as a monument to preserve social hierarchy, and more as a place to visit, to move through'.¹⁶⁵ In *Repertorium* the tombs are organised spatially rather than chronologically and as Browne guides the reader around the Cathedral he does not only point out the building's old tombs and monuments, but also draws attention to its new additions: 'The pavement also of the cloister on the same side was broken and the stones taken away, a floor of dust remaining: but that side is now handsomely paved by the beneficence of my worthy friend William Burleigh, Esq'.¹⁶⁶ As Barbour claims, Browne is eager 'to stress the restored and continuing vitality of his world'.¹⁶⁷ He looks to the Cathedral's future when noting that the chapel of St. John had

¹⁶³ Joseph Hall quoted in Browne, 'Repertorium: Or Some Account of the Tombs and Monuments in the Cathedral Church of Norwich', 301.

¹⁶⁴ Barbour, *Sir Thomas Browne: A Life*, 449.

¹⁶⁵ Post, 'Miscellaneous Browne among the Tombs of Norwich Cathedral', 266.

¹⁶⁶ Browne, 'Repertorium: Or Some Account of the Tombs and Monuments in the Cathedral Church of Norwich', 297.

¹⁶⁷ Barbour, *Sir Thomas Browne: A Life*, 451.

been turned into the Free School.¹⁶⁸ Barbour states: ‘When the Free School makes its appearance in *Repertorium*, old manuscripts interact with what for Browne is the continuing vitality of Winchester phrases, of Martial and Horace with good notes from modern scholars, and of classical wisdom transformed by the living, breathing advancements of learning in the gardens and laboratories of Norwich families’.¹⁶⁹ On a similar note, Browne describes how the tomb of Bishop Richard Montagu represents a man who ‘studied and wrote very much, had an excellent library of books, and heaps of papers, fairly written with his own hand, concerning the ecclesiastical history. His books were sent to London; and, as it was said, his papers against Baronius and others transmitted to Rome; from whence they were never returned’.¹⁷⁰ Browne leaves the fate of Montagu’s scholarship to open-ended speculation and again *Repertorium* looks towards the future. This perspective is most clearly illustrated in the closing pages of Browne’s text, which takes the reader to the top of the Cathedral’s spire:

divers persons went up to the top of the pinnacle. They first went up into the belfry, and then by eight ladders, on the inside of the spire, till they came to the upper hole, or window; then went out unto the outside, where a staying was set, as so ascended up unto the top stone, on which the weathercock standeth.¹⁷¹

From this high vantage point the man-made achievements of the city look insignificant: ‘The Castle hill, and high buildings, do very much diminish’.¹⁷² The end of *Repertorium* recognises that the human attempt to immortalise oneself in stone is trivial compared to the resurrection of the soul, which is represented by the climbing of the Cathedral spire. In ‘Urne Buriall’ Browne writes: ‘In vain do individuals hope for Immortality, or any

¹⁶⁸ Browne, ‘Repertorium: Or Some Account of the Tombs and Monuments in the Cathedral Church of Norwich’, 291.

¹⁶⁹ Barbour, *Sir Thomas Browne: A Life*, 451-2.

¹⁷⁰ Browne, ‘Repertorium: Or Some Account of the Tombs and Monuments in the Cathedral Church of Norwich’, 288.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 303.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

patent from oblivion, in preservations below the Moon'.¹⁷³ Browne presents the Walsingham urns as symbols of vanity and foolishness. He thereby undermines their status and in turn his own extravagant discourse on funerary rites. In *Religio Medici* Browne elaborates on his disregard for memorials: 'Now, one reason I tender so little devotion unto reliques is, I think, the slender and doubtful respect I have always held unto antiquities; for that, indeed, which I admire, is far before antiquity; that is, Eternity; and that is, God himself'.¹⁷⁴ Browne undermines the content of both 'Urne Buriall' and *Repertorium* in service of the far greater message that immortality belongs to the heavenly, rather than the earthly, self. To quote Samuel Taylor Coleridge, this self-effacement significantly contributes to the 'grave Humour that rendered T. B. so delightful'.¹⁷⁵ Nash picks up on Browne's humour towards the end of chapter three of 'Urne Buriall' in a small illustration called *The Opened Tomb*, (fig. 12). Nash presents a skeleton in a coffin. It has long, thick hair, a string of beads around its neck and a grimace that shows off a full set of white teeth. Nash illustrates this sentence from Browne's text: 'Teeth, bones and hair, give the most lasting defiance to corruption'.¹⁷⁶ Browne explains that buried bones and plants are preserved if the grave is airtight but if it is exposed to 'the piercing Atomes of ayre ... they begin to spot and betray their green entrals'.¹⁷⁷ Ironically, once the grave is discovered, and begins to communicate its purpose as memorial, it decays. This skeleton, when concealed and unseen, keeps its good looks. The slight grimace on its face expresses the painful irony that its burgeoning beauty will never again be seen by anyone.

Urne Buriall

I argue that the interchange between morbidity and optimism in 'Urne Buriall' is

¹⁷³ Browne, *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus ... with Thirty Drawings by Paul Nash. Edited with an Introduction by John Carter*, 50.

¹⁷⁴ Browne, 'Religio Medici', 43.

¹⁷⁵ Coleridge, *Coleridge on the Seventeenth Century*, 462.

¹⁷⁶ Browne, *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus ... with Thirty Drawings by Paul Nash. Edited with an Introduction by John Carter*, 34.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

also apparent in Nash's paintings of the late 1920s and early 1930s. *Landscape at Iden* (1929, fig. 13) presents a view over the Rother Valley from the back of Nash's home at Oxenbridge Cottage, Iden, Sussex. It is spring. In the centre foreground is a trug of cut logs. To the left a staff sticks out of the ground. Behind and further to the left is a wattle fence. Standing opposite the wattle fence, on the right, is a large screen used to protect orchards from the frost and wind. In the middle ground stands a trapezoidal pile of logs, neatly stacked. Behind the logs there is a fence and intertwined in this fence is a snake. Behind the fence stands an orchard of young fruit trees, some of which are supported by canes. A gate in the far edge of the orchard leads towards the hills of the Isle of Oxney. Above the hills float six trapezoidal clouds. There are no people in this scene but human traces are found in the numerous tools of cultivation left tidily in the forefront of the painting. Beal explains how Iden means 'place of the yew tree', a plant usually found in graveyards.¹⁷⁸ Working with this meaning, she explores the painting's association with death and notes how felled trees in Nash's vocabulary often represent corpses.¹⁷⁹ According to Beal, *Landscape at Iden* depicts a graveyard of First World War victims, with the dead piled up in rows. She argues that death is further signified in the young fruit trees behind the woodpile, which 'reflect the defencelessness of youth, cut down before it flowers in the face of war'.¹⁸⁰ Beal links Nash's felled trees to his friendship with the poet and art critic Laurence Binyon. Like Nash, Binyon associates the destruction of trees with the massacre of men. Beal quotes Binyon's memoirs of his time as a British Red Cross orderly in France during the First World War:

the black ruins and white blossom haunted one's mind and my thoughts were full of the young who were dead, fallen in their faith and cause, and lying now in how many thousands of graves under the earth of their country, that spread before me in the spring sunshine. It seemed to my fancy that they had risen again in that triumphant blossom to reassure the world.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸ Beal, 'For the Fallen: Paul Nash's *Landscape at Iden*', 20.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁸¹ Binyon, *For Dauntless France: An Account of Britain's Aid to the French Wounded and Victims of the War*, 253-4.

Nash made shelled landscapes a focus of his work as an officially commissioned war artist. In the war painting *We Are Making a New World* (1918, fig. 14), Nash's trees are black, withered and stand in swampy earth. However, above this wasteland the sun rises and its rays stream through the blood red clouds and blasted trees. Bertram speculates that the sun suggested the regeneration of waste.¹⁸² From this perspective the painting's title, *We Are Making a New World*, loses some of its irony. The suggestion of hope in Nash's war painting is also present in the quote from Binyon. Beal fails to note the optimism in Binyon's last sentence, when the dead appear resurrected in 'that triumphant blossom'.¹⁸³ I argue that the war gave Nash both a heightened sense of morbidity and a feeling for the endurance of nature. Browne explores the cyclical pattern of life in *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus* when he comments on the womb-like shape of the urn that makes 'our last bed like our first; nor much unlike the urns of our nativity, while we lay in the nether part of the earth'.¹⁸⁴ This sentence upholds a promise of rebirth within nature. I argue that this promise is realised in *Landscape at Iden's* young trees, which suggest new life rather than the slaughter of youth. Similarly, the trapezoidal pile of cut wood, duplicated in the trapezoidal clouds in the sky, can be read as the resurrection of the dead rather than, as Beal argues, their ghosts.¹⁸⁵ Focusing on the morbidity of *Landscape at Iden*, Beal compares the painting with Nash's 'Urne Buriall' illustration *Funeral Pyre*, (fig. 15). The orderly stack of sawn-up logs creates an obvious likeness between the two pictures. Beal describes *Funeral Pyre* as 'a massacre'.¹⁸⁶ Christopher Townsend associates the illustration with the First World War: identifying the tree in the right background as a

¹⁸² Bertram, *Paul Nash: The Portrait of an Artist*, 105.

¹⁸³ Binyon, *For Dauntless France: An Account of Britain's Aid to the French Wounded and Victims of the War*, 254.

¹⁸⁴ Browne, *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus ... with Thirty Drawings by Paul Nash. Edited with an Introduction by John Carter*, 32.

¹⁸⁵ Beal, 'For the Fallen: Paul Nash's Landscape at Iden', 22.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

poplar, rather than the conventionally funereal cypress.¹⁸⁷ Poplars lined the roads of northern France and dominated Nash's war-lithograph *Marching at Night* (1918). Townsend recognises a further reference to the First World War in the severed hand in the forefront of the illustration. He notes that such 'fragments of bodies were common detritus on the front lines; they are mentioned by diarists who encountered them whilst on patrol in no-man's land, in the march to and from the front lines'.¹⁸⁸ The pile of sawn-up logs on fire in the background reinforces this violent association with war. However, the fire can also be read as a sign of new life. While the funeral pyre destroys the body it supposedly releases the spirit. The hand at the forefront of the painting no longer waves but this motion is adopted by the flames that curl into the air and look like waving hands. The flames inject *Funeral Pyre* with a dynamism that contrasts the motionless hand on the floor. The flecks of ashes that rise up into the sky and turn into birds highlight a sense of resurrection. It is interesting to note that at the end of chapter one of 'Urne Buriall' Browne references the phoenix, a mythological bird consumed by fire to rise anew.¹⁸⁹ Nash marks this reference with a small illustration called *Skeleton, Phoenix and Snake* (fig. 16), which shows a phoenix and snake reaching upwards toward the sun. As Causey states, alongside the phoenix as a symbol of the cyclical pattern of death and new life, Nash also 'understood the snake as a symbol of renewal, for the way it sloughed off its old skin and acquired a new one; he admired it in the form of the uroboros, the snake that forms a circle and bites its own tail as a symbol of infinity'.¹⁹⁰ The phoenix and snake represent the dynamic between Browne's two essays, where the morbidity of 'Urne Buriall' blossoms into new life in 'The Garden of Cyrus'.

Funeral Pyre and *Skeleton, Phoenix and Snake* suggest an underlying optimism within

¹⁸⁷ Townsend, 'We are Making a New World': Death, Modernity and Order in Paul Nash', forthcoming 2015.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Browne, *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus ... with Thirty Drawings by Paul Nash. Edited with an Introduction by John Carter*, 13.

¹⁹⁰ Causey, *Paul Nash: Landscape and the Life of Objects*, 91.

the morbidity of Browne's first essay. This optimism is more clearly demonstrated in another illustration for 'Urne Buriall' entitled *Generations Passe* (fig. 17), which has a large oak at its centre. The tree's branches sprawl to the edge of the frame and its wide trunk suggests that the oak is old. Leaves that look like clouds give the impression that the tree is reaching far into the sky and this further accentuates its size. Framing the centre of the tree is a square and circle. Inscribed on the centre of the tree trunk is the symbol theta θ , the character of death. The ground carries a grid pattern. There is an open grave at the forefront of the illustration and an urn stands to the right of the grave. The circle, square, theta, grave, tree and grid provide an almost symmetrical composition, which only the urn unbalances. *Generations Passe* loosely correlates with this section of Browne's text:

Circles and right lines limit and close all bodies, and the mortall right-lined circle, must conclude and shut up all. There is no antidote against the *Opium* of time, which temporally considereth all things; Our Fathers finde their graves in our short memories, and sadly tell us how we may be buried in our Survivors. Grave-stones tell truth scarce fourty years: Generations passe while some trees stand, and old Families last not three Oaks.¹⁹¹

Death is at the heart of this passage. Nash's illustration conveys this by placing theta at the centre of the composition. Nash frames theta within a circle and square, which is another depiction of the right-lined circle symbolising death. The horizontal line represents the corporeal and divisible, while the circle represents perfection and immortality. These two aspects of theta, death and immortality, accord with the respective subject matters of 'Urne Buriall' and 'The Garden of Cyrus'. Death comes with resurrection in *Generations Passe* because the symbol theta, stamped into the heart of the tree, illustrates a connection between heaven and earth. This connection is also illustrated by the oak itself, which has its roots in the earth and its branches in the sky. The urn is outside the square and circle, which excludes it from the association between heaven and earth. Appropriately, in the passage just quoted, Browne describes how graves and urns

¹⁹¹ Browne, *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus ... with Thirty Drawings by Paul Nash. Edited with an Introduction by John Carter*, 48.

have a short life span compared with the grand old oak tree.¹⁹²

Barbour suggests that Browne wrote both essays as a means of consolation for the two grieving men to whom they were dedicated.¹⁹³ 'Urne Buriall' is dedicated to Thomas Le Gros, who had just suffered the death of his father, while 'The Garden of Cyrus' is dedicated to Nicholas Bacon, who had recently lost two uncles. Browne presents Le Gros with the notion that 'Christian Immortality frustrates all earthly glory [...]. Life is a pure flame, and we live by an invisible Sun within us'.¹⁹⁴ Similarly, Bacon is told that 'the delightfull World comes after death, and Paradise succeeds the Grave'.¹⁹⁵ This sense of consolation may have been poignant for Nash, whose father died in February 1929.¹⁹⁶ According to his wife Margaret, nothing so profoundly affected her husband as his father's death, which he saw as a premonition of his own.¹⁹⁷ Coincidentally, shortly after the death of his father Nash was diagnosed with chronic asthma, which eventually killed him in 1946. With this in mind, Browne's statement speaks clearly to Nash's situation: 'Generations passe while some trees stand, and old families last not three oaks'.¹⁹⁸ From the 1930s onwards Nash often focused on enduring structures within the landscape, such as old oak trees, quincuncial orchards, hill forts and megaliths. The long, ancient life of the landscape helped compensate for Nash's sense of his and others' brevity. The quincuncial floor of *Generations Passe* represents God's perfection on earth and supports my claim that ancient landmarks became a place of refuge for Nash in the face of death. The ground is laid with a series of quincunx, the five-pointed shape central to Browne's second essay. This is the first illustration of the quincunx in 'Urne Buriall' and the first

¹⁹² 'Grave-stones tell truth scarce forty years'. Ibid.

¹⁹³ Barbour, *Sir Thomas Browne: A Life*, 347.

¹⁹⁴ Browne, *Urne Buriall and the Garden of Cyrus ... with Thirty Drawings by Paul Nash. Edited with an Introduction by John Carter*, 51.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 59.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 48.

¹⁹⁷ Bertram, *Paul Nash: The Portrait of an Artist*, 145.

¹⁹⁸ Browne, *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus ... with Thirty Drawings by Paul Nash. Edited with an Introduction by John Carter*, 48.

obvious connection that Nash makes between the two essays. Its appearance upholds a connection Browne makes in the second essay between the quincunx and theta. Towards the end of 'The Garden of Cyrus' he writes:

Of this Figure *Plato* made choice to illustrate the motion of the soul, both of the world and man; while he delivereth that God divided the whole conjunction length-wise, according to the figure of a Greek X, and then turning it about reflected it into a circle; By the circle implying the uniform motion of the first Orb, and by the right lines, the planetical and various motions within it. And this also with application unto the soul of man, which hath a double aspect, one right, whereby it beholdeth the body, and objects without; another circular and reciprocal, whereby it beholdeth it self.¹⁹⁹

As X revolves it takes on the form of theta, the figure of death. Like theta, the revolving X has a circle at its edge and a right-line through its middle. The circle reflects the soul and the right-line reflects the body. Here, Browne demonstrates that within the quincunx lies the figure of death. Therefore the optimistic subject matter of the second essay is touched by the morbidity of the first. Nash conveys this by including the quincunx in his illustrations for 'Urne Buriall' and, as will be shown, incorporating death into his illustrations for 'The Garden of Cyrus'.

The Garden of Cyrus

The first illustration for 'The Garden of Cyrus' is *Vegetable Creation* (fig. 18). It depicts Eden. Nash exhibits a forest of colour, with foliage that is wild and full of life. There is an X at the centre of the composition, made by two curving branches. The X is geometrically imperfect and there is no symmetry to this illustration. Nothing here shows the ordered design of the gardens to come. The viewer must wait for Cyrus the Great, who is said to have first planted the trees in the shape of the quincunx, to bring 'the treasures of the field into rule and circum-scription'.²⁰⁰ *Vegetable Creation* is a much

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 113.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 63.

brighter illustration than those found in 'Urne Buriall'. Everything looks new and full of life. Its vitality is reinforced by some of the leaves, which have an overtly vaginal appearance, and also the phallic cactus flowering near the centre. *Vegetable Creation* is markedly dissimilar to the second illustration *Poysonous Plantations* (fig. 19), which depicts the garden after the Fall. Its title conveys the notion of 'death from life', reversing the regenerative idea of 'life from death' that 'Urne Buriall' promotes. The illustration presents a view through a window onto a landscaped garden, which one assumes has been cultivated by Cyrus. The quincunx is indicated near the centre of the composition, where a stream of light and the top of a mountain cross to form a geometrically perfect X. A tree stands in the distance outside. At the top of one branch there is a single, very large white flower. The tree is obviously at a distance, but the size of its flower matches the size of the flowers inside the room. Nash plays with proportions to draw a parallel between inside and outside, translating the domestication of the inside scene onto the garden outside. On a table before the window there is a tall glass of dark red liquid, an hourglass and some cut plants. One of the plants is poker-shaped and surrounded by a green hood-like leaf. The others are clusters of red berries on green stems. Nash presents two separate parts of the *arum maculatum*, a woodland plant common in England. The poker-shaped part of the plant, the spadix, appears in the spring. In the autumn it produces a cluster of bright red berries, which remain after the spadix and leaves have withered away. These berries are very poisonous. They contain sharp crystals that irritate the mouth and cause swelling in the throat, resulting in difficulty breathing.²⁰¹ The *arum maculatum* has many common names, which are often based on opposites due to the plant's composite character. One of its names, 'Lords and Ladies', refers to the plant's likeness to male and female genitalia. The sexuality of the first illustration therefore continues in the second. However, in *Poysonous Plantations* sexuality is codified in objects associated with death, such as the hourglass and cut plants. The connection between sexuality and death suggests the shame and mortality that humanity suffered after being

²⁰¹ The *arum maculatum* may be a self-reference to the asthma that Nash suffered.

cast out of Eden. With this in mind, it is interesting to note that another name for the arum maculatum is 'Adam and Eve'. *Poysonous Plantations* references this sentence from chapter one of 'The Garden of Cyrus': 'King *Attalus* lives for his poysonous plantations of *Aconites*, Henbane, Hellebore, and plants hardly admitted within the walls of Paradise'.²⁰² This reference confirms that the walled garden in *Poysonous Plantations* is not Eden. Although Browne never directly discusses the Fall, I argue that it is at the heart of the apparently optimistic second essay because Cyrus' garden is the imitation of paradise. Before illustrating Browne's texts, Nash already shows interest in the creation story when he produces a series of woodcuts in 1924 to illustrate Genesis.²⁰³ Additionally, Beal understands the Fall to be central to *Landscape at Iden*.²⁰⁴ The orchard at Iden appears like a fortress. The screen, log pile, and fence introduce barrier upon barrier into the painting. Lying in the distance is a little five bar gate that leads out onto rolling hills towards the Isle of Oxney. Does this distant gate lead to Eden? Is the path to paradise blocked by a barrier of agricultural tools left by people who painfully toil the cursed ground all the days of their lives?²⁰⁵ In the late 1920s Nash lived beside Oxenbridge Farm and the orchard in *Landscape at Iden* was part of the farmer's land. Nash structured his painting around a dense agricultural set-up, which dominated the orchard and indicated that someone had been toiling the fields. The snake entwined on the fence suggests this may have been Adam.

Amidst the dry Middle Eastern landscape Cyrus built the first walled garden, which can be interpreted as an imitation of paradise. The geometric perfection of the man-made quincunx was a reflection of God's perfection. However, as mere reflection it was also a reminder of humanity's estrangement from Him. In this sense, the quincunx was both a symbol of immortality and an expression of human finitude. Browne hints at

²⁰² Browne, *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus ... with Thirty Drawings by Paul Nash. Edited with an Introduction by John Carter*, 64.

²⁰³ *Genesis. Twelve Woodcuts by Paul Nash* (1924).

²⁰⁴ Beal, "For the Fallen": Paul Nash's 'Landscape at Iden', 20.

²⁰⁵ Gen. 3:17 (New International Version).

this in chapter two of ‘The Garden of Cyrus’ when discussing the appearance of the quincunx in man-made structures. According to Browne, its pattern is ‘observable in the ruins of the *Forum Nervæ*, the *Mausoleum* of *Augustus*, the Pyramid of *Cestius*’;²⁰⁶ The quincunx forms part of ancient tombs in decay. Nash picks up on the morbidity of Browne’s observation in the illustration *The Quincunx Artificially Considered* (fig. 20), which presents the bust of Caesar before a ruined castle. The quincunx, forming the pattern on the window and floor of the ruined castle, is thoroughly enmeshed in structures of decay. *The Quincunx Artificially Considered* is reminiscent of a *memento mori* painting, focusing on objects associated with death to remind people of their mortality.²⁰⁷ *Memento mori*, Latin for ‘remember you will die’, was a prevalent message in seventeenth-century art and literature and ‘Urne Buriall’ is considered a key *memento mori* text. *The Quincunx Artificially Considered* indicates that ‘The Garden of Cyrus’ maintains the *memento mori* element of ‘Urne Buriall’. The Latin phrase refers to Genesis 3:17-9, when God speaks to Adam:

And unto Adam He said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed *is* the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat *of* it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou *art*, and unto dust shalt thou return.²⁰⁸

Although Browne does not directly reference Genesis, he evokes it in the opening of ‘Urne Buriall’ with the recollection that ‘*Adam* were made out of an extract of the Earth’.²⁰⁹ In the second essay Cyrus fights the mortality that Adam symbolised by planting the quincuncial orchard, which Browne suggests was ‘the Symbole of the

²⁰⁶ Browne, *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus ... with Thirty Drawings by Paul Nash. Edited with an Introduction by John Carter*, 70.

²⁰⁷ A good example of a *memento mori* painting is Philippe de Champaigne’s *Vanité, ou Allégorie de la vie humaine* (1646).

²⁰⁸ Gen. 3:17-19 (King James).

²⁰⁹ Browne, *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus ... with Thirty Drawings by Paul Nash. Edited with an Introduction by John Carter*, 7.

Resurrection'.²¹⁰ For Browne, gardens represent eternal life and the ritual of dressing burial places like the garden of paradise symbolises the life that comes after death. He explains that 'to flourish in the state of Glory, we must first be sown in corruption. Besides the ancient practise of Noble Persons, to conclude in Garden-Graves, and Urnes themselves of old, to be wrapt up in flowers and garlands'.²¹¹ Browne highlights the association between the garden, death and resurrection, which Nash repeatedly explores in his illustrations for *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus*.²¹² This theme was very much Nash's own in the late 1920s and early 1930s and 'Garden-Graves' is an apt name for a number of paintings he produced in 1929 following the death of his father.²¹³

Browne's notion of 'garden-graves' may have developed during the time he studied medicine at the University of Padua in 1632-3.²¹⁴ When Browne arrived in Padua the city was still suffering the aftermath of the 1630-1 plague. The university was so badly affected that the professoriate was significantly reduced in size and the school lacked an anatomist for two years.²¹⁵ In December 1632, the year Browne arrived, the anatomy chair was finally appointed to Johann Vesling, who was also an expert on flora and later took over as botany professor in 1638. Vesling's dual interests highlighted the link between Padua's botanical garden and its anatomy theatre, which connected the idea of gardens and graves. The Paduan botanical garden, constructed in the sixteenth century, has a circular frame within which stands a cross dividing the area into four sections. Its shape relates to theta and highlights the garden's connection between heaven and earth. Barbour notes that the garden's circle is 'a symbol of divinity, perfection ... the square an

²¹⁰ Ibid., 59.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² *Buried Urne, Generations Passe and Poysonous Plantations*.

²¹³ *February* (1929), *Month of March* (1929), *Landscape at Iden* (1929).

²¹⁴ Barbour, *Sir Thomas Browne: A Life*, 347.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 148.

emblem of the world's four corners, continents, elements'.²¹⁶ The botanical garden acted as a postlapsarian, earthly paradise. John Prest claims:

Throughout the middle ages the Garden was believed, somehow, to have survived the Flood, and in the great age of geographical discoveries in the fifteenth century, navigators and explorers had hopes of finding it. When it turned out that neither the East nor West Indies contained the Garden of Eden, men began to think, instead, in terms of bringing scattered pieces of the creation together into a Botanic Garden, or new Garden of Eden.²¹⁷

The early modern period strongly associated plants with healing powers and therefore the botanical garden promised protection from death. Prest notes: 'At Padua the curator in charge of the Botanic Garden was the professor of pharmacology, and the pillars supporting the tank from which the garden was watered featured statues of Aesculapius, Hippocrates, and Galen, three giants of ancient medicine, and of Mithridates, who was immune to poison'.²¹⁸ The medicinal properties of the garden emphasise the early modern connection between people and plants. According to Barbour, Vesling would have stressed to Browne: 'Analogous in their general beauty but also in the distribution of their parts, human beings and plants are also alike in having marvellously wise modes of generation'.²¹⁹ In seventeenth-century learning the analogy between humans and plants was strong, which helped explain the connection between 'Urne Buriall' and 'The Garden of Cyrus'. Dealing with antiquarianism and natural history respectively, these interactive fields shared early modern conceptions of *historia*. Gianna Pomata and Nancy Siraisi state that in contrast to the modern use of the term history, '*historia* straddled the distinction between human and natural subjects, embracing accounts of objects in the natural world as well as the record of human action. One may say, in fact, that from the early Renaissance to the eighteenth century, nature was fully part of the field of research called

²¹⁶ Ibid., 170.

²¹⁷ Prest, *The Garden of Eden: The Botanic Garden and the Re-Creation of Paradise*, 9.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 57.

²¹⁹ Barbour, *Sir Thomas Browne: A Life*, 168.

historia'.²²⁰ In accordance with Pomata and Siraisi's statement, there is a scientific aspect to the mostly philological 'Urne Burial' in Browne's discovery of adipocere, which is a wax of human fat that naturally preserves the body from decomposition.²²¹ Correspondingly, there is a philological aspect to the natural history of 'The Garden of Cyrus' when Browne recognises signs of the crucifixion in nature by claiming that the figures 'of nails and crucifying appurtenances, are but precariously made out in the *Granadilla* or flower of Christs passion: And we despair to behold in these parts that handsome draught of crucifixion in the fruit of the *Barbado* pine'.²²² Browne's two essays demonstrate 'striking parallels between ways of observing and ways of reading, close links between firsthand observation and book learning, thus bringing into focus the peculiar brand of scholarly or 'learned' empiricism that characterized the practice of *historia* and the world of European learning before the hardening of the distinction between the humanities and the natural sciences'.²²³ I argue that Nash's painting *Month of March* (1929, fig. 21) demonstrates the coupling of observation and exegesis in a similar manner to Browne's texts. The painting is closely connected to *Landscape at Iden* through its shared outlook from Oxenbridge Cottage. The trug in *Landscape at Iden* is made in Sussex and therefore connects both paintings to rural southern England.²²⁴ The wattle fence in the left corner of the two paintings is used to protect young fruit trees from frost and suggests, along with the painting's title, that it is early spring. *Month of March* observes a specific location and a particular time of year. However, it also makes a more generalised, biblical reference through a tall, oddly designed ladder that divides the composition in half. Causey states that the painting presents 'a kind of Jacob's ladder connecting earth with heaven: an idea

²²⁰ Pomata and Siraisi, 'Introduction', 2.

²²¹ 'Teeth, bones, and hair, give the most lasting defiance to corruption. In an Hydropicall body ten years buried in a Church-yard, we met with a fat concretion, where the nitre of the Earth, and the salt and lixivious liquor of the body, had coagulated large lumps of fat, into the consistence of the hardest castle-soap; whereof part remaineth with us'. Browne, *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus ... with Thirty Drawings by Paul Nash. Edited with an Introduction by John Carter*, 32.

²²² *Ibid.*, 96.

²²³ Pomata and Siraisi, 'Introduction', 7-8.

²²⁴ Beal, 'For the Fallen': Paul Nash's 'Landscape at Iden', 19.

which Nash was certainly interested'.²²⁵ Causey associates *Month of March* with the sixteenth-century painting attributed to Nicolas Dipre called *Jacob's Dream*, which Nash includes in a review of a French art exhibition at the Royal Academy in 1932.²²⁶ The painting illustrates this section of Genesis:

And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it.
And, behold, the Lord stood above it, and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed;
And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.²²⁷

The biblical connotations within the very local setting of *Month of March* mirror the extension of the particular onto the universal in 'Urne Buriall' and 'The Garden of Cyrus'. In 'Urne Buriall' Browne examines local urns in order to ruminate on collective notions of death and memorial. Similarly, in 'The Garden of Cyrus' Browne's close observation of nature shows signs of the crucifixion. Post argues that 'Browne's genius was to construct large designs out of small matter'.²²⁸ I argue that Nash has a similar tendency, as he transforms a local landscape into a stage for biblical re-enactment in *Month of March*.

Browne for the Twentieth Century

In Nash's work death is often linked to terrestrial landscapes, while new life is often associated with aerial landscapes. Causey states that 'it is important in Browne's Neoplatonic thought that the soul had two aspects, one upward-facing towards the principle and the other downward-pointing towards the earth and base matter'.²²⁹ Causey suggests that Nash reflects this duality in his illustration *Ghosts* (fig. 22), which shows a

²²⁵ Causey, *Paul Nash*, 173.

²²⁶ Nash, 'The French Exhibition', 40-1.

²²⁷ Gen. 28:12-14 (King James).

²²⁸ Post, 'Miscellaneous Browne among the Tombs of Norwich Cathedral', 262.

²²⁹ Causey, *Paul Nash: Landscape and the Life of Objects*, 93.

staircase leading from the sky down into a subterranean world.²³⁰ The sea life indicates an underwater scene, while clouds, trees and a totem pole imply an aerial focus. Causey claims that Nash 'is selective in his approach to Browne but – in personalising the writer's expression of the contrast between reaching for the heights and plumbing the depths – he is not dismissive of Browne's principle'.²³¹ I add to the connections Causey makes between Browne's prose and Nash's illustrations by examining *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus* within the wider cultural context of interwar British modernism. This outlines the common perception of Browne in the 1920s and 1930s and therefore hints at Nash's point of entry into his prose. The 1932 edition of *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus* forms part of a wider renaissance of early modern writers during the first half of the twentieth century. Modernists like T. S. Eliot, Herbert Read and Virginia Woolf revive metaphysical poets such as John Donne, George Herbert, Henry Vaughan, Richard Crashaw and Thomas Traherne.²³² There are around five hundred and forty books and articles on early modern poets published between 1912-38.²³³ In those twenty-six years the list was twice as long than it was for the whole of the nineteenth century.²³⁴ Like the metaphysical poets, Browne's presence in the literary canon is weak during the nineteenth century. From 1800-95 there are only sixteen publications of his work in Britain, compared with forty-five publications between 1896-1939. Donne is the most popular figure in the revival of early modern writers and his rise to fame really begins with the publication of Herbert Grierson's *The Poems of John Donne* (1912) and swells 'to a great crescendo during the Donne tercentenary in 1931', the year Nash illustrates *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus*.²³⁵ Eliot is at the centre of Donne's revival and his essays, 'The Metaphysical Poets' (1921) and 'John Donne' (1923), present two of the high points of

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Ibid., 94-5.

²³² T.S. Eliot, 'The Metaphysical Poets' (1921); Herbert Read, 'The Nature of Metaphysical Poetry' (1923); Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader: Second Series* (1932).

²³³ Spencer and Van Doren, *Studies in Metaphysical Poetry*, 3.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Duncan, *The Revival of Metaphysical Poetry: The History of a Style, 1800 to the Present*, 165.

his appreciation. In the late 1920s Eliot's enthusiasm for Donne wanes but his brief endorsement helps promote the widespread opinion that the metaphysical poets are distinctly modern.²³⁶ Joseph Duncan claims that certain critics from the 1920s 'present Donne not simply as like certain modern poets, but as the prototype of modern man'.²³⁷ Writers and critics draw detailed comparisons between the seventeenth and twentieth centuries as periods marked by international war, religious doubt and scientific advancement. For these people, Donne's poetry reflects the disillusioned atmosphere of the time.²³⁸ Commenting on the metaphysical poets, H. J. Massingham claims that the twentieth century could 'understand the *malaise* of many of these poets, the complex questionings and frustrations of some, the unrest and bitter awakening to the setting not the rising sun of hope in others'.²³⁹ According to Duncan, twentieth-century critics understand Donne's interest in science, and the scepticism it generates, to cause the poet to focus on the workings of his mind.²⁴⁰ Duncan claims that in 'the age of psychoanalysis Donne came to be regarded as psychoanalytic'.²⁴¹ Similarly, Strachey and Woolf perceive Browne as a psychological writer.²⁴²

Strachey claims that the most important thing about Browne is his idiosyncratic literary style.²⁴³ He discusses the performative nature of Browne's prose with regards to temporality and quotes this famous passage from 'Urne Buriall':

To extend our memories by Monuments, whose death we daily pray for,
and whose duration we cannot hope, without injury to our expectations in
the advent of the last day, were a contradiction to our beliefs. We whose

²³⁶ It must be noted that Eliot himself may not have shared in the view that the metaphysical poets were modern.

²³⁷ Duncan, *The Revival of Metaphysical Poetry: The History of a Style, 1800 to the Present*, 169.

²³⁸ Raiziss, *The Metaphysical Passion. Seven Modern American Poets and the Seventeenth-Century Tradition*, 107-110.

²³⁹ Massingham, *A Treasury of Seventeenth Century English Verse: From the Death of Shakespeare to the Restoration (1616-1660)*, 21.

²⁴⁰ Duncan, *The Revival of Metaphysical Poetry: The History of a Style, 1800 to the Present*, 172.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Strachey, 'Sir Thomas Browne', 45; Woolf, 'The Elizabethan Lumber Room', 70.

²⁴³ Strachey, 'Sir Thomas Browne', 36.

generations are ordained in this setting part of time, are providentially taken off from such imaginations. And being necessitated to eye the remaining particle of futurity, are naturally constituted unto thoughts of the next world, and cannot excusably decline the consideration of that duration, which maketh pyramids pillars of snow, and all that's past a moment.²⁴⁴

Strachey explains that 'the long, rolling, almost turgid clauses, with their enormous Latin substantives, seem to carry the reader forward through an immense succession of ages, until at last, with a sudden change of the rhythm, the whole of chronological time crumbles and vanishes before his eyes'.²⁴⁵ Browne establishes a series of oppositions, extend/death, advent/last, futurity/decline, which pushes forwards and pulls backwards through time. Nash mirrors this achronic treatment of time in his illustrations for *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus* and in many of his paintings from the 1930s in general. In 1937 Myfanwy Evans writes that Nash 'paints three-thousand years without turning a hair'.²⁴⁶ This statement can be read in conjunction with Nash's *Frontispiece* (fig. 23) for 'Urne Buriall', which unites the urn's various designs over a range of centuries. In a clockwise motion Nash begins with a simple, undecorated urn and finishes with the most complex, handled and lidded urn, which stands at the centre. Additionally, Nash illustrates the urn's various artistic representations over time. The white urn is the most crudely drawn and has the least detail. The dark urn, also on the right but slightly nearer the front, has a more complex shape and a mottled pattern. Thirdly, the urn on the left inhabits three-dimensional space and is drawn in greater detail. Lastly, the central urn is drawn in the most detail and stands in pride of place atop a shaft of light. The first urn bears a striking resemblance to a prehistoric drawing from a book in Nash's library called *The Story of Primitive Man* (1905). The drawing is of an engraving on an aboriginal

²⁴⁴ Browne, *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus ... with Thirty Drawings by Paul Nash. Edited with an Introduction by John Carter*, 46-7.

²⁴⁵ Strachey, 'Sir Thomas Browne', 41.

²⁴⁶ Evans, 'Paul Nash', 12.

gravestone that depicts people and animals buried underground.²⁴⁷ The people are buried with urns that are flat and white. These two-dimensional urns are surrounded by a dark, abstract pattern and their similarity to the white urn at the right of Nash's illustration is undeniable. *Frontispiece* begins with the primitive representation of an urn and moves clockwise, finishing on a naturalistic, and thereby more modern, representation. Nash sweeps the viewer up in the succession of ages and, to repeat Evans' phrase, paints 'three-thousand years without turning a hair'.²⁴⁸ *Frontispiece* becomes further associated with Browne's achronic prose through the imprint of an urn on the left-hand side of the broken wall. This imprint can be read as the most recent artistic representation of the urn, which has developed away from the naturalism of three-dimensional space into a two-dimensional semi-abstract. The imprint echoes Nash's contemporaneous oil painting *Opening* (1930-1, fig. 24), which presents a stone doorway opening onto a beach. The door juts out of the painting, like the wall in *Frontispiece*, and neatly cuts the composition in half to block the view of the seascape. On the door there is a white imprint of what appears to be a fireplace that, like the urn, is cut in half. It is interesting to note that *Opening* stems from a semi-abstract study made in 1927, which excludes the seascape and brickwork of the later painting. The early study presents a room mostly reduced to a composition of abstract shapes. Just perceptible is the doorway, fireplace and a vase. *Opening* and its prototype are two of Nash's most abstract paintings and their similarity to *Frontispiece* suggests that the white imprint of the urn was a reference his modernist experiments. The aesthetic similarities between the two-dimensional imprint and the primitive urn connect the very modern with the very ancient. Like Browne's prose, Nash's illustrations present a union of opposites that generate an achronic notion of time.

Browne also disturbs chronological progression by repeatedly employing outmoded classical terminology in his writing. Browne's Latinisms have been criticised

²⁴⁷ Clodd, *The Story of 'Primitive' Man*, 70.

²⁴⁸ Evans, 'Paul Nash', 12.

for obscuring the message of his prose and critics have claimed that Browne had ‘no excuse for writing about the “pensile” gardens of Babylon, when all that is required can be expressed by “hanging”’.²⁴⁹ Strachey states that such criticism demonstrates a lack of appreciation for the complexity of Browne’s thought, which can only be expressed through an overwrought linguistic style: ‘The state of mind which he wished to produce in his readers was nearly always a complicated one: they were to be impressed and elevated by a multiplicity of suggestions and a sense of mystery and awe’.²⁵⁰ Browne’s philosophy centres on the Creator, who exists beyond the reach of perception. Therefore humankind’s highest form of thought is structured around the incomprehensible. Browne stated: ‘Let intellectual tubes give thee a glance of things which visive organs reach not. Have a glimpse of incomprehensibles; and thoughts of things, which thoughts but tenderly touch’.²⁵¹ Strachey claims that obscure Latinisms are the most appropriate means of expressing the enigmatic nature of Browne’s thought. These half-forgotten words associate Browne’s prose with certain Nash paintings from the 1930s, which conjure dim reminiscences of ancient things. For example, in 1935 Nash returns to Oxfordshire to paint the Wittenham Clumps. *Wittenham* (1935, fig. 25) presents bold undulations of earth leading to a clump of trees, which have branches that look like human limbs reaching skywards. The branches are thick with foliage that sits on top of the tree like a dark raincloud. One of Nash’s trademark sculptural clouds blows in towards the Clumps, suggesting a culminating moment of drama that never materialises. These compelling elements pervade the site with vague legends of tree-men and ominous aerial forces. *Wittenham* stands on the brink of significance. Neve explains:

From the time he first saw the Clumps, Nash never got them entirely out of his mind. He must have climbed up to them as a boy and never really escaped them. They mark an Iron Age fort, Stone Age ditches, the burial

²⁴⁹ Strachey, ‘Sir Thomas Browne’, 38.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 40.

²⁵¹ Browne, ‘Christian Morals’, 114.

places of Roman pottery and Saxon bones, many layers of occupation, all of them hidden between roots and cowslips.²⁵²

In his autobiography Nash writes that the Clumps are haunted by histories and legends that are long forgotten.²⁵³ However, he also claims that it is the site's formal strength, rather than its historical significance, that actually fascinates him.²⁵⁴ I modify Nash's claim to argue that the formal strength of the site, represented in the hill's deep undulations and the trees' thick foliage, fascinates Nash because it alludes to ancient legend. These forceful, yet indistinct, symbols of the antique press upon the viewer like Browne's overwrought Latinisms. By focusing on the vagaries of ancient things, Browne and Nash demonstrate the limitations of life. Due to human brevity, there exists before people a heap of historical space that cannot be known. Peter Miller describes 'Urne Buriall' as the 'recognition that there was a never-to-be closed abyss separating the past – all pasts – from the present, and that neither the might of the imagination nor the utterly natural human desire to reverse the course of time could ever succeed'.²⁵⁵ Browne incorporates the muteness of the past into his prose and similarly the animated shapes at *Wittenham* highlight the Clump's half-remembered existence as myth. The work of both Browne and Nash are full of suggestive touches, employed 'by an elaborate evocation of memories and half-hidden things' that sit tantalisingly beyond the viewer's grasp.²⁵⁶

In 'The Elizabethan Lumber Room' (1925) Woolf's appraisal of Browne's literary style verges on criticism as she describes his idiosyncratic writing as an impurity, staining 'literature with so many freakish colours that, however hard we try, it is difficult to be certain whether we are looking at a man or his writing'.²⁵⁷ Woolf immediately counters this critical tone by remarking that when reading Browne 'we are in the presence of

²⁵² Neve, 'The Problem of Time: Paul Nash', 7.

²⁵³ Nash, *Outline: An Autobiography and Other Writings*, 122.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Miller, *Peiresc's Europe: Learning and Virtue in the Seventeenth Century*, 154.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Woolf, 'The Elizabethan Lumber Room', 70.

sublime imagination'.²⁵⁸ According to Woolf, 'Urne Buriall' presents a man whose mind, and thereby his writing, is littered with exotic treasures from the furthest reaches of the earth. Browne guides the reader 'through one of the finest lumber rooms in the world – a chamber stuffed from floor to ceiling with ivory, old iron, broken pots, urns, unicorns' horns, and magic glasses full of emerald lights and blue mystery'.²⁵⁹ Woolf begins her essay by discussing a number of Elizabethan books that centre on the spoils collected by sixteenth-century English explorers on their travels around the globe. She claims that when reading these texts, one sits 'down in semi-darkness to snuff the strange smells of silks and leathers and ambergris, while outside tumble the huge waves of the uncharted Elizabethan sea'.²⁶⁰ Woolf explains that the Elizabethan age of exploration generates new ideas, new words and new objects for literature. These voyages expand the mind and the new world becomes a symbol for uncharted areas of the psyche.²⁶¹ Woolf pinpoints Browne as the first writer to focus on the psychological.²⁶² As Browne states in *Religio Medici*: 'The world that I regard is myself; it is the microcosm of my own frame that I cast mine eye on'.²⁶³ Woolf presents Browne as his own psychiatrist and, whether this interpretation is fair, one can easily recognise that the urns are not artefacts to be studied but vessels for Browne's idiosyncratic ideas on life, death and eternity. The psychological aspect of 'Urne Buriall' would surely attract Nash, who in the early 1930s develops a keen interest in surrealism's concern with the internal workings of the mind.²⁶⁴

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 71.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 60.

²⁶¹ Ibid., 65.

²⁶² Ibid., 68.

²⁶³ Browne, 'Religio Medici', 111-2.

²⁶⁴ Nash's wife Margaret wrote: 'Our stay in Paris [1930] brought us into contact with many friends who happened to be visiting at the same time, and we also met a number of French artists – Ernst, Arp, Gleizes, Masson, Zadkin, the sculptor, Picasso, and others whose names I cannot remember now. Paul, for the first time, became really interested in an aspect of Surrealist painting, namely the release of the dream'. Typed Document with Autograph Annotations, 'Memoir of Paul Nash, 1913-1946' by Margaret Nash, ca. 1950, TGA 769/2/6, Paul Nash Collection, Tate Archive, London.

Around the time of illustrating *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus* Nash becomes particularly interested in the paintings of proto-surrealist Giorgio de Chirico. Like Browne, de Chirico takes ‘possession of antiquity by removing it both from the past and from the world of phenomena into a psychic reality’.²⁶⁵ De Chirico reconstructs the world according to his own mental framework. In an article written for *The Listener* Nash discusses de Chirico’s *Melancholy and Mystery of a Street* (1914), which depicts a scene of old arcades. A small girl runs with a hoop across train tracks in the bright sunlight. She is backlit and shown in silhouette. She passes an open, empty wagon and heads towards an arcade that is shrouded in darkness. At the far end of the arcade a shadow of a man falls on the brilliant street. The dark, desolate spaces, the man’s shadow and the open cart, inject a threatening quality into this otherwise idyllic, antiquated scene. De Chirico presents a dream world, threatened by a symbolism that remains mystifying. Nash comments:

In this and many other paintings of a similar conception Chirico, for the purpose of his art, made his first attack upon a new pictorial terrain, or rather he at once discovered and created a new ‘world’. This ‘world’ which exists by virtue of the functions of the subconscious mind, and in relation to which Chirico stands as a sort of Columbus, is now inhabited and extended by an ever-increasing number of painters and writers who are recognised under the rather misleading title of the Surrealist Movement.²⁶⁶

In 1931, in a manner that echoes Woolf’s description of Browne, Nash announces de Chirico as a new Columbus who explores the uncharted territories of the mind. This indicates that while Nash was illustrating ‘Urne Buriall’ he was considering the expansion of the world through psychological exploration. His illustrations highlight this anthropomorphic concern because they include five depictions of the human form, three

²⁶⁵ Green, ‘There is No Antiquity’: Modern Antiquity in the Work of Pablo Picasso, Giorgio De Chirico, Fernand Léger, and Francis Picabia (1906-36), 7.

²⁶⁶ Nash, ‘Giorgio De Chirico’, 59.

of which are possible self-portraits.²⁶⁷ This focus on the human is unusual for Nash, who paints twenty-seven portraits in his entire career.²⁶⁸ I argue that the human figure is common in 'Urne Buriall' because Nash is influenced by, what Woolf describes as, Browne's 'immense egotism'.²⁶⁹ Nash expresses humankind's egotistical approach to the past in the 'Urne Buriall' illustration *Tokens* (fig. 26), which carefully positions a selection of Anglo-Saxon grave goods to make a human face.²⁷⁰ There is an oversized latchlifter key at the centre, which forms the nose. Circling the key, a string of beads makes the head. The birds are eyes and the worm is a mouth. The moustache is formed from either the foot of a trefoil small-long brooch or a florid cruciform brooch, both common Anglo-Saxon artefacts from East Anglia.²⁷¹ The latchlifter key is a Roman-style object commonly found in Anglo-Saxon graves. The beads are usually present in furnished Anglo-Saxon graves and are often reconstructed in museums on a string, as seen in Nash's illustration. This suggests that Nash encountered the beads through an exhibition, although proof of this has not been found. *Tokens* presents whole artefacts, which would have been mostly destroyed in Browne's urns by the funeral pyre. Therefore, Nash does not record what was found in the urns at the point of excavation but uses his imagination to reconstruct what was included at the point of burial. Nash imaginatively reconstructs a fragmented past and transforms it into a human face. He may have got this idea from de Chirico's costume designs for the Ballets Russes' production of *Le Bal*, which was shown

²⁶⁷ The human form appears in *The Opened Tomb*, *Ghosts*, *Sorrow*, *Tokens* and *Juglers*, which is a small illustration in chapter three. At least three of these illustrations can be read as self-portraits. *Juglers* presents a man who looks like Nash, balancing bones and a skull on his head. The black haired figure in *Sorrow* also looks like Nash and the wraith walking down the steps in *Ghosts* has been identified as Nash by Causey. Causey, *Paul Nash*, 225.

²⁶⁸ Causey notes twenty-seven portraits painted by Nash, spanning from 1911-32. Causey, *Paul Nash*, 483-5.

²⁶⁹ Woolf, 'The Elizabethan Lumber Room', 68.

²⁷⁰ This face is possibly Nash's own as there are three other suspected self-portraits in 'Urne Buriall': *Juglers*, *Sorrow*, *Ghosts*.

²⁷¹ I would like to thank Professor Howard Williams for providing information on the artefacts depicted in *Tokens*.

at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden in the summer of 1929.²⁷² De Chirico decorates the dancers' bodies with debris from antiquity, transforming their hair into marble and their legs into Doric columns.²⁷³ Ancient artefacts are attached to the moving body. This gives the past a dynamism, causing it to appear disorientating and unobtainable. Juliet Bellow states that in *Le Bal* 'ruinous bodies, refigured as assemblages of mismatching parts, haunted the stage like ghosts of a past that could never be fully revived nor wholly dispatched'.²⁷⁴ De Chirico's costumes comment on humankind's fragmented relationship to the past and accord with Nash's paintings of Wittenham and Browne's treatment of the urns, where some 'furtive phantom seems to escape from the pale clay, but it is voiceless and it has vanished before we could challenge it'.²⁷⁵

The past adopts a ghostly presence throughout Nash's illustrations for 'Urne Buriall'. I argue that these spectral allusions are inspired by the original frontispiece for 'Urne Buriall', despite the fact that at first sight it shows no signs of haunting. The original frontispiece is a traditional antiquarian engraving depicting four urns varying in size and decoration. Clearly the purpose of this frontispiece is documentation rather than artistic expression and, in sharp contrast to Browne's text, there is no subjective flair to the image. The urns are positioned face on and are neatly spaced apart. They are relatively uniform in size and shape and are presented on a plain white background. Each urn casts a shadow on the floor, giving it a three-dimensional, naturalistic appearance. The urns' patterns are rendered so accurately that Sir John Evans claims to have recognised them as Saxon rather than Roman from the engraving.²⁷⁶ The utilitarian appearance of this frontispiece contrasts the obscurity of Browne's text, which imaginatively jumps from

²⁷² Although there is no evidence that Nash saw this production, he was interested in ballet and wrote an article called 'An English Ballet' (1919) that was stimulated by the Ballet Russes' performance of *La Boutique Fantasque* in Leicester Square.

²⁷³ These costume designs echo the way de Chirico merges the human with ancient artefacts in paintings like *The Disquieting Muses* (1916-8).

²⁷⁴ Bellow, 'Animated Stones: Giorgio De Chirico's *Le Bal* and the Neo-Classical Body', 312.

²⁷⁵ Gosse, 'Urn-Burial and Garden of Cyrus', 111.

²⁷⁶ Evans, 'Introduction', xx.

one subject matter to another. For example, when describing the urns Browne is sidetracked by a reference to the Latin elegiac poet Propertius and begins to talk about ghosts: 'Now that they accustomed to burn or bury with them, things wherein they excelled, delighted, or which were dear unto them [...]. Observable from the Gemme or Berill Ring upon the finger of *Cynthia*, the Mistresse of *Propertius*, when after her Funerall Pyre her Ghost appeared unto him'.²⁷⁷ Browne references book four of *The Elegies*, which is a particularly gruesome part of Propertius' poem that describes the ghost of his mistress Cynthia:

her clothing was burnt at her side,
the fire had consumed the ring always on her finger,
and the Lethean water had touched her lips.²⁷⁸

Rather than discuss the urns objectively, Browne's prose appropriates the poetry of Propertius and associates the urns with a frightful image of death. Surprisingly, this ghostly digression is first alluded to at the bottom of the original frontispiece, which also quotes Propertius. This quote is the only poetic aspect of the engraving: 'En sum quod digitis Quinque Levatur onus'.²⁷⁹ These words are spoken by the ghost of Cornelia, another past lover or wife of Propertius, who rises out of her own funeral pyre to speak to him. Cornelia remarks that all remaining of her now is dust and five fingers could lift her weight.²⁸⁰ This is a haunted passage. Cornelia speaks of the world of shadows and her change in weight suggests her transformation into a ghost. This reference to Propertius introduces the spectral at the opening of 'Urne Buriall'. Nash seems to have noticed this, for *Frontispiece* opens the 1932 edition of *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus* with equally spectral allusions. *Frontispiece* is compartmentalised, as some areas of the illustration have a

²⁷⁷ Browne, *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus ... with Thirty Drawings by Paul Nash. Edited with an Introduction by John Carter*, 20.

²⁷⁸ Propertius, *The Complete Elegies of Sextus Propertius*, 385.

²⁷⁹ '... and now I am a burden which may be collected by five fingers'. Propertius, *The Complete Elegies of Sextus Propertius*, 411.

²⁸⁰ Browne makes a similar comment in chapter three of 'Urne Buriall': 'how the bulk of man should sink into such few pounds of bones and ashes'. Browne, *Urne Buriall and the Garden of Cyrus ... with Thirty Drawings by Paul Nash. Edited with an Introduction by John Carter*, 31.

flat pictorial space while others are in three-dimensions. This means there is no single vanishing point to the illustration and its effect is unsettling. Nash's illustration appears in sharp contrast to the original frontispiece, though it is perhaps better suited to the Propertius quote because it seems to be haunted by spirits. The elevated urn makes the obvious association with the soul's ascension to heaven, while the imprint of the urn on the wall appears as a ghost-like apparition. The dark clouds create a threatening atmosphere that is perfect for haunting and complements the ghostly appearance of the green vessel in the foreground, which is opaque and possibly glass. Its patterning suggests something is moving inside, though what this is remains indistinguishable. The vessel could be a tear bottle, which is often included in Roman graves to hold the mourner's tears.²⁸¹ Nash places his signature inside the bottle. This is an interesting touch because in the early 1930s Nash contemplates his own death after recently developing symptoms of asthma.

Frontispiece references Browne's achronic approach to time by suggesting the resurrection of the dead. Wyndham Lewis also references this aspect of Browne in his poem *One-Way Song* (1933):

I should like to have you tell me why Browne's *Urne*,
Makes all the Past with firework colours burn.²⁸²

Lewis acknowledges Browne's revitalisation of the urns, which is presumably important for the former leader of the Vorticist movement. Lewis had rejected Vorticism by the 1930s but still retained some of its sentiment in *One-Way Song*, which promoted progress.²⁸³ Vorticism wanted to destroy the constraints of the past. In an introductory manifesto to the movement Lewis wrote: 'We stand for the Reality of the Present—not

²⁸¹ If it is a tear bottle then Nash is mixing Roman and Saxon objects in his illustration, which displays a disregard for archaeological fact.

²⁸² Lewis, 'One-Way Song', 25.

²⁸³ 'Try and walk backwards: you will quickly see, how you were meant only *one-way* to be! Lewis, 'One-Way Song', 66.

for the sentimental Future, or the sacripant Past ... we only want the world to live, and to feel its crude energy flowing through us'.²⁸⁴ In a manner that may have pleased an ex-Vorticist like Lewis, the illustrations for *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus* make the past speak in Nash's own modern language.²⁸⁵ Lewis and Nash were never close friends. They fell out in 1919 and since then avoided meeting.²⁸⁶ However, Causey claims that each 'remained interested in the others' work'.²⁸⁷ The Vorticists influenced some of Nash's earlier paintings, like *A Lake in a Wood* (1916) and *Wyttschaete Woods* (1917). Conversely, Nash's illustrations for *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus* are thought to have inspired Lewis' reference to Browne in *One-Way Song*.²⁸⁸ *Frontispiece* and Lewis' poem suggest that Browne's vision of the past was as intangible as a firework or as evasive as a ghost. All three artists communicate the impossibility of finding concrete truth in the past and these few words from Browne's first essay sum up the message of his whole text: 'we have no historical assertion or denial'.²⁸⁹ Strachey emphasises this aspect of Browne's prose, which he claims conjured up a 'strange freight of reminiscences and allusions from the unknown depths of the past'.²⁹⁰ 'Urne Buriall' destroys historical certainty. However, Strachey recognises how 'one visionary figure [Browne] flits with a mysterious pre-eminence, flickering over every page' to unite this fractured past.²⁹¹ Strachey, like Woolf, Nash and Lewis, appreciate Browne's ability to make the past speak in his early modern idiom. I now examine the extent to which Nash does a similar thing as he revitalises the past, particularly Browne's text, through his engagement with modernism.

²⁸⁴ Lewis, 'Long Live the Vortex!', 7.

²⁸⁵ I have recognised the influence of abstraction on Nash's frontispiece and the possible reference to de Chirico in *Tokens*.

²⁸⁶ Causey notes that 'Nash's poor relations with Lewis were, as with Fry, the result of a personality clash at a time when Nash was suffering from severe nervous strain after the war.' Causey, *Paul Nash*, 83.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Alan Munton suggests that Lewis' reference to 'Urne Buriall' was a direct reference to the recently published 1932 edition of *Urne Buriall and the Garden of Cyrus* illustrated by Nash. Munton, 'Explanatory Notes', 210.

²⁸⁹ Browne, *Urne Buriall and the Garden of Cyrus ... with Thirty Drawings by Paul Nash. Edited with an Introduction by John Carter*, 21.

²⁹⁰ Strachey, 'Sir Thomas Browne', 45.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

Modernism

Nash was never at the forefront of the British avant-garde and most of his work can only be loosely described as modernist. However, his art was at its most experimental in the early 1930s, around the time he produced *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus*. Nash's wife confirmed that creatively this was an important time for her husband: 'He speaks of it [*Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus*] in his notes as a period of research and contemplation, and he obviously felt that the slow unfolding of this series of designs was a very important turning point in his career as an artist'.²⁹² Charles Harrison notes that the early 1930s was a time of change for British modernism in general.²⁹³ Edward Wadsworth was painting abstracts, like *Composition on Red Ground* (1931) and Ben Nicholson had begun to explore the poetry and shape of space with anti-figurative work like *Painting* (1932). British modernism had waned in the late 1910s and early 1920s and was considered conservative compared to the work produced before the war by the London-based Vorticists. In 1914 members of Vorticism, like Lewis and Wadsworth, produced abstract and near-abstract work in celebration of the industrial life that had been transforming Britain over the last one hundred and fifty years. Lewis' painting *The Crowd* (1914-5) presents the grid of a city formed by a complex intersection of geometric shapes that vaguely resemble windows, roads, skyscrapers and chimneys. Accompanying Vorticist painting was Lewis' magazine *Blast* (1914-5), which ran for two issues. The first issue was an overt celebration of modernity: 'But our industries, and the Will that determined, face to face with its needs, the direction of the modern world, has reared up steel trees where the green ones were lacking; has exploded in useful growths, and found wilder intricacies than those of Nature'.²⁹⁴ In *Blast 2* (1915) the radical celebration of industry was replaced by the pessimistic observation that murder 'and destruction is

²⁹² 'Typed Document with Autograph Annotations, 'Memoir of Paul Nash, 1913-1946' by Margaret Nash, ca. 1950, TGA 769/2/6, Paul Nash Collection, Tate Archive, London.

²⁹³ Harrison, 'Abstract Painting in Britain in the Early 1930s', 184.

²⁹⁴ Lewis, 'Manifesto II', 36.

man's fundamental occupation'.²⁹⁵ There were no more issues of *Blast* after 1915, as the war began to demonstrate the potential horror of industrial modernity and encouraged many avant-garde artists to curb their celebration of the machine. In accordance with *Blast's* cessation, Lewis began to withdraw from abstraction and he focused on the more traditional subject matter of portraiture. After the war the revolutionary period of British modernism appeared to be over. However, during the 1920s abstraction started to regain a certain degree of prominence, especially for those artists who were too young to form part of the Vorticist movement. Pre-war modernist sensibilities were not wholly revived but younger artists, like Barbara Hepworth, Nash and Nicholson, began, to greater and lesser extents, to focus on pure form and geometric composition. It must be noted that Nash never produced a purely abstract painting and his work always corresponded to objects in the real world. In the 1920s a mild form of abstraction entered Nash's work through an exaggeration of geometric forms that occur naturally within the English landscape. *The Great Dyke, Romney Marsh* (1922) presents a country path fractured into triangles by the geometrical extrusion of sloping hills. This level of abstraction continued throughout the decade and reached its peak in the early 1930s with paintings like *Opening* and *Kinetic Feature* (1931, fig. 27). Nash's friend and art critic, R. H. Wilenski, recognised that by the late 1920s Nash's paintings were structured around the Cubist imposition of an 'austere, angular and geometrical form of vision'.²⁹⁶

Nash subtly incorporated his geometrical vision into a number of illustrations for *Urne Buriall* and *The Garden of Cyrus*.²⁹⁷ Harrison claims that while working on the book Nash 'was becoming increasingly interested in problems of style and design which led him toward abstraction'.²⁹⁸ The formal strength that persists throughout Nash's

²⁹⁵ Lewis, 'War Notes,' 16.

²⁹⁶ See *Lares* (1930) and *Kinetic Feature* (1931). Wilenski quoted in Causey, *Paul Nash*, 144.

²⁹⁷ *The Quincunx Mystically Considered*, *Endpiece* for 'Urne Buriall' and *Endpiece* for 'The Garden of Cyrus'.

²⁹⁸ Harrison, 'Abstract Painting in Britain in the Early 1930s', 184.

illustrations was clearly inspired by Browne's discussion of geometry.²⁹⁹ 'The Garden of Cyrus' is dedicated to the appearance of the quincunx both in nature and in man-made objects. This focus keeps the geometric tethered to the terrestrial plane, which suits an artist like Nash who never experimented with pure abstraction.³⁰⁰ The close relationship between *The Quincunx Naturally Considered* and *The Quincunx Mystically Considered* (fig. 28) demonstrates the way that abstraction was entirely bound to the real world for Nash. The first illustration is a figurative representation of a sunflower, teasel, fern, catkin, pinecone, oak leaf and acorn. The geometric rays of the sun, which itself is a perfect circle, shines orderly over the plants. The latter illustration is near-identical in composition but the natural objects have been transformed into geometric shapes and the sun has turned into an eye. *The Quincunx Mystically Considered* is the most abstract illustration in *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus*. However, its radical aesthetic is moderated by its naturalistic counterpart, *The Quincunx Naturally Considered*. The eye at the top of *The Quincunx Mystically Considered* links the illustration to Browne's claim that 'all things are seen quincuncially'.³⁰¹ This unintentional suggestion of Cubism is picked up by Nash in *The Quincunx Mystically Considered*, which bears a striking resemblance to Picasso's pen and ink drawing *Project for a Monument, Dinard* (1928). Causey observes that Picasso depicts a human figure, fractured into a variety of semi-abstract shapes that form an almost identical outline to Nash's illustration.³⁰² This allusion to Picasso is another suggestion of Nash's reluctance to fully embrace abstraction because it relates abstract shapes back to the vague figuration of the *Dinard*. In an article called 'Abstract Art' (1932), written the year that *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus* was published, Nash describes Picasso as 'the greatest of all abstract painters'.³⁰³ Nash fails to recognise that Picasso never produced a

²⁹⁹ Browne, *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus ... with Thirty Drawings by Paul Nash. Edited with an Introduction by John Carter*, 89.

³⁰⁰ Nash, 'For, But Not With', 112.

³⁰¹ Browne, *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus ... with Thirty Drawings by Paul Nash. Edited with an Introduction by John Carter*, 111.

³⁰² Causey, *Paul Nash*, 232.

³⁰³ Nash, 'Abstract Art', 79.

truly abstract painting but always referred, however indirectly, to objects in the world.

Nash's statement highlights his tentative exploration of geometric abstraction during the 1930s.

Picasso's influence on *Urne Buriall* and *The Garden of Cyrus* is also traceable in the antiquarian subject matter of Browne's first essay. In the 1920s antiquity became one way for artists like Picasso to 'develop' their aesthetic. Picasso's neoclassical painting, *The Pipes of Pan* (1923), depicts sandy-coloured square blocks against a plain horizon-line of sky and sea. Two young men are hemmed in by this scene and stand poised like figures on a Pompeii fresco.³⁰⁴ One youth sits playing the pipes, while the other stares into the foreground of the painting. The right block of stone tapers upwards slightly, which foreshortens perspective and pushes it into the forefront of the composition. The stone breaks away from the traditional illusion of three-dimensional space into a flatter, more cubist space. These young figures are cornered by the building blocks of modernism, which reverberate the sound of their ancient pipes into the present. *The Pipes of Pan* illustrates the revision of antiquity undertaken by Picasso, who rejects the neoclassical tradition forwarded by Johann Joachim Winckelmann in the eighteenth century. Winckelmann celebrated the art of classical antiquity and inspired generations of artists to treat it as the true aesthetic that must be imitated. In contrast, Picasso approaches antiquity with an anachronistic, modernist sensibility. He conflates the ancient and modern in *The Pipes of Pan* and thus debars any direct return to classical origins. Christopher Green claims that for an artist like Picasso 'the art of antiquity had meaning only if it could be transformed, reinvented, revalued – and only if it could speak in the present tense'.³⁰⁵ Picasso's reinvention of antiquity undermines Winklemann's demand that contemporary artists must faithfully imitate the ancients. Many continental

³⁰⁴ The youths' faces appear notably similar to the faces of Mars and Venus on a famous Pompeii fresco from the first century AD. Elizabeth Cowling notes that Picasso owned a postcard of this fresco. Cowling, *Picasso: Style and Meaning*, 433.

³⁰⁵ Green, "There is No Antiquity": Modern Antiquity in the Work of Pablo Picasso, Giorgio De Chirico, Fernand Léger, and Francis Picabia (1906-36)', 2.

modernists saw Wincklemann as a promoter of 'fake' classicism. Guillaume Apollinaire writes that it 'was the German aestheticians and painters who invented academicism, that fake classicism which true art has been struggling against ever since Winckelmann, whose pernicious influence can never be exaggerated'.³⁰⁶ In opposition to Wincklemann, Picasso does not return to antiquity as a matter of regression but as a matter of bringing the past into the present. He states:

To me there is no past or future in art. If a work of art cannot live always in the present it must not be considered at all. The art of the Greeks, of the Egyptians, of the great painters who lived in other times, is not an art of the past; perhaps it is more alive today than it ever was.³⁰⁷

An important influence on Picasso's neoclassicism is Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872). Picasso first encounters Nietzsche's writings in Barcelona at the beginning of the twentieth century and runs articles on the philosopher in a journal he co-edited called *Arte Joven* (1901). Nietzsche is also an important influence on de Chirico, who claims to have read a great deal of the philosopher's work by at least 1910.³⁰⁸ It is almost certain that Nash does not read Nietzsche. However, many of his continental influences do and the philosopher is, so to speak, in the air for modern art in the 1920s and 1930s. Nietzsche locates artistic salvation in Attic tragedy, which arises from the reconciliation between two warring creative impulses, Apollo and Dionysus. Apollo is the Greek god of sculpture, who maintains the boundaries of the individual. According to Nietzsche, Apollo is subsumed by Dionysus, who represents the purely emotional side of life, as the Greek God of wine, music and sex. As the Dionysian impulse breaks forth, barbarous and unaesthetic, the strength of Apollo's equanimity transforms this impulse into artistic expression. In the sixth century BC the fusion of these two gods gives birth to the chorus in Attic tragedy, whose song inspires an agitated sense of mind in the combination of

³⁰⁶ Apollinaire, *Apollinaire on Art: Essays and Reviews 1902-1918*, 444.

³⁰⁷ Picasso, 'Two Statements by Picasso', 4.

³⁰⁸ De Chirico, *The Memoirs of Giorgio De Chirico*, 61.

Apollonian contemplation and Dionysian will.³⁰⁹ As equanimity and frenzy collide, concrete structures of truth are dissolved and the slave emerges 'as a freeman'.³¹⁰ Nietzsche states that 'all the rigid, hostile walls which either necessity or despotism has erected between men are shattered'.³¹¹ This shattering is the essence of Dionysian rapture, whereby 'the law of causation seems to suspend itself' and truths, traditions and norms are undone.³¹² Nietzsche's reading of Attic tragedy predicts the practice of modernism, which emerges around twenty years after his text is first published. The modern movement, like Attic tragedy, prohibits the individuation of a concrete body of meaning and fosters a multi-vocalism that presents truth in the form of excess and contradiction. Attic tragedy and modern art undertakes a revaluation of values. Nietzsche presents a futuristic vision of preclassical Greece, which is the site for a rebellion against the reasoned nineteenth-century bourgeois. As Greece becomes the blueprint of modernism, Nietzsche counters the idea of chronological progression and makes the past present. The law of causation is suspended and history is no longer a sequence of perceived facts but an aesthetic creation, which can be made and remade. *On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life* (1874) states that 'only if history can endure to be transformed into a work of art will it perhaps be able to preserve instincts or even evoke them'.³¹³ I argue that under Nietzsche's influence, Picasso transforms the past into his own aesthetic creation and reshapes it through modernist experiment.

Primitivism

In order to free art from the rationality of the nineteenth-century bourgeois, both Nietzsche and Picasso look to preclassical Greece for inspiration. Green notes that since 1906 Picasso was interested in sixth-century BC kouroi, which are sculptures of male youths from preclassical Greece. Green suggests that two headless kouroi, found in the

³⁰⁹ Nietzsche, 'The Birth of Tragedy', 70.

³¹⁰ Ibid., 23.

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² Ibid., 22.

³¹³ Nietzsche, 'On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life', 95-6.

temple of Apollo in Actium and on display at the Louvre, inspired the artist.³¹⁴ Picasso's appreciation of kouroi coincided with a major cultural revaluation of preclassical Greek art, which began in Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century when archaeology's privileging of classical antiquity waned. Identifying a turning point in archaeology, Green described how Gisela Richter's *The Sculpture and Sculptors of the Greeks* (1929) seamlessly linked the archaic to the classical period, associating the former with purity and distancing it from the ignorance with which it was previously identified.³¹⁵ Nash appears to unite preclassical and classical antiquity in his 'Urne Buriall' illustration *Tokens*. At the top of the illustration there is a double-sided comb commonly found in graves from the seventh century, which is a time when pagan Anglo-Saxon's were converting to Christianity. This period of transition links the comb to the two birds at the top of the illustration. One bird is black and the other is white with a berry in its beak. The black bird can be read as a 'bird brooch', a Merovingian artefact sometimes found in early Anglo-Saxon graves and therefore representative of pagan Britain. In contrast, the white bird may be an allusion to engravings on the Easby Cross, which is an Anglo-Saxon sandstone standing cross dating from AD800 and representative of Christian Britain. On the cross there is a bird pecking at a berry, just like the one in Nash's illustration. The Victoria and Albert Museum acquired fragments of the Easby Cross while Nash was working on his illustrations for *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus*, although it is not certain if he was aware of this acquisition. I argue that *Tokens* includes a pagan-period artefact and a Christian-period artefact, which thereby references both preclassical and classical antiquity. By exploring ancient cultures outside of classicism both Picasso and Nash indulged in, what was perceived as, more primitive aspects of the past.

Since the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries certain continental modernists take inspiration from primitive sources for their art. This movement can be

³¹⁴ Green, "There is No Antiquity": Modern Antiquity in the Work of Pablo Picasso, Giorgio De Chirico, Fernand Léger, and Francis Picabia (1906-36), 5-6.

³¹⁵ Ibid., 6.

seen to begin with Paul Gauguin and continues into the twentieth century with artists like Picasso and Paul Klee. These artists look for inspiration beyond 'civilised' Europe in order to liberate themselves from the conventions of their own artistic traditions.

Primitivism contributes to the idea that these modernists access a purer form of representation than the western tradition cultivates. Nash is interested in Klee and owns the 1929 *Cahiers d'Art* edition of Will Grohmann's book on the artist. The primitivism of Klee's imagery is not purely figurative or non-figurative, but might be called conceptual. In *They're Biting* (1920) Klee presents the sun as a yellow disc and the sailboat as a simple mast and deck. Flat and featureless, these images do not represent particular objects but are symbols for those objects. This symbolism appears in *Frontispiece*, where the white urn can be read as a universal symbol of death rather than the representation of an actual urn. The two-dimensional white urn recalls many Klee objects, which work within the two-dimensionality of non-western art. As previously stated, the two-dimensional urn appears in an illustration from a book in Nash's library, which presents an engraving on an aboriginal gravestone depicting humans and animals buried in the earth. The gravestone shows a cross-section of the earth. At the top of the image there is a living tribe, beneath which kangaroos and other animals are buried in a layer of earth. Underneath this there is a strip of white that separates one layer of earth from another, below which there are two white urns that recall *Frontispiece*. At the bottom of the image are figures of the dead, presumably either ancestors or victims of the tribe above. A more naturalistic spatial setting, which included a three-dimensional perspective, could not easily convey this scene. Similar to the Australian gravestone, *They're Biting* shows a cross-section of land and water that allows the viewer to see both above and below the surface.³¹⁶ However, unlike the gravestone image, Klee's painting is not completely flat. The difference in size between the large fish and the small boat creates a sense of perspective that places the

³¹⁶ James Smith Pierce associates *They're Biting* with an Eskimo engraving reproduced in Herbert Kuhn's *Kunst der Primitiven* (1923). Smith Pierce states: 'In an illusionistic rendering of the subject, half the story would have to be left untold because all that could be shown would be the Eskimo with his line dropping out of sight into a hole in the ice'. Smith Pierce, *Paul Klee and Primitive Art*, 62.

fish in the foreground of the painting. Additionally, James Smith Pierce notes a subtle spatial device whereby the two-dimensional waterline doubles up as the horizon-line in depth.³¹⁷ The former perspective flattens the space of the painting. However, the latter perspective makes the painting three-dimensional as the horizon-line causes the ship and island to appear entirely on the surface of the water, which pushes them into the foreground.³¹⁸ In *They're Biting* objects occupy both two-dimensional and three-dimensional space. This double aspect undermines the western artistic tradition of rendering three-dimensional objects on a flat canvas. Klee's painting creates a spatial tension that *Frontispiece* lacks. Objects in *Frontispiece* occupy both two and three-dimensional space but, unlike Klee, Nash moves awkwardly between dimensions by partitioning off parts of the picture surface with structures like a brick wall or a shaft of light. As a result, Nash's illustration lacks the subtle critique of Klee's painting. Klee uses primitivism, as does Picasso, to push the boundaries of art. Although Nash is experimenting with modernist techniques in the early 1930s, he never truly challenges the western tradition. Causey states that it 'is sad that Nash was not able to learn more from Picasso, in particular, about the amalgamation of different uses of space within a single picture, which was one of the most impressive achievements of Picasso's Cubism just before the First World War'.³¹⁹ A portion of Nash's library, held in the Tate Archives, suggests that he had greater enthusiasm for antiquarianism than avant-garde art. The archive shows that Nash owned thirteen books directly related to prehistory and antiquity.³²⁰ In contrast, the archive only shows seven books directly related to avant-

³¹⁷ Ibid., 63.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ Causey, *Paul Nash*, 237.

³²⁰ *Horns Of Honour And Other Studies In The By-Ways Of Archaeology* by Frederick Thomas Elworthy (1900); *A Dictionary Of Classical Antiquities, Mythology, Religion, Literature and Art, from the German Of Dr. Oskar Seyffert* by Henry Nettleship (1902); *The Costume Of The Original Inhabitants Of The British Islands* by Sir Samuel Rush Meyrick (1815); *Rude Stone Ornaments In All Countries: Their Age And Uses* by James Fergusson (1872); *Mythical Monsters* by Charles Gould (1886); *Wessex From The Air* by O. G. S Crawford (1928); *The Dorset Landscape* by Geoffrey Clark (1935); *Dorset* by Frank Heath (1933); *The Beauties Of England* by anon (1758); *The Story of Primitive Man* by Edward Clodd (1895); *Stonehenge - A Temple Restor'd To The British Druids* by William Stukeley (1740); *Abury, A Temple of the British Druids with Some Others Described* by William Stukeley (1743); *Stukeley*,

garde art.³²¹ It must be noted that this is just a selection of Nash's library and also the libraries of fellow artists like Edward Burra would have supplemented Nash's material on the avant-garde. However, this collection still suggests that Nash's interest in antiquity outweighed his interest in avant-garde art and such an assumption is supported by his selective appropriation of modernist techniques. An oil painting like *Whiteleaf Cross* presents antiquity adjusted, rather than radically reshaped, by a modernist vision. The painting depicts a cross carved into a chalk hill in Buckinghamshire. Nash extends the geometrics of the cross into other aspects of the landscape, like the leaves on the trees that are sculpted into squares and triangles. A triangular sense of ascension pervades the scene and the trees, path and cross all taper upwards towards the triangle-shaped clouds in the sky. The only element of the painting that is not geometric and ascending is the scattering of bushes that look like they are rolling down the hill. The downward motion of these irregular bushes reinforces the sense that geometric perfection is the prevailing force in this painting.

Abstraction and Metaphysics

I argue that Nash's forays into 'abstraction' reveal more about the metaphysical aspects of his work than his formal concerns. Causey explains:

If, as Nash himself and later critics have agreed, abstract designs like *The Quincunx Mystically Considered* are unsatisfactory as art, if abstraction altogether was beyond the reach of Nash as an artist and if the course he was following in that design proved a cul-de-sac, it is nevertheless still worth giving his work detailed attention because Nash's devotion to Browne and his keenness to follow the writer to the end clarify the artist's own spiritual values and aspirations.³²²

Avebury and the Druids by Stuart Piggott (1935).

³²¹ *Surrealism* by Herbert Read (1936); *The Meaning of Modern Sculpture* by R. H. Wilenski (1932); *The Modern Movement in Art* by R. H. Wilenski (1927); *Paul Klee* by Will Grohmann (1929); *Georges De Chirico* by C. Aubert (1927); *Serge Férat* by Jean Cocteau (1924); *Le Bestiaire, ou Cortège d'Orphée* by Guillaume Apollinaire (1919).

³²² Causey, *Paul Nash: Landscape and the Life of Objects*, 97.

Connections between geometrical ‘abstraction’ and metaphysical symbolism dominate Nash’s work from the early 1930s. Harrison states that in the illustrations for *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus* ‘the crisis between abstract form and metaphysical content becomes acute’.³²³ As stated in the introduction, Nash does not employ near-abstraction for its own sake but puts it in the service of the metaphysical. Discussing the connection between abstraction and metaphysics in modernist art, Harrison claims that hidden in the depths of the most abstract English paintings of the early 1930s ‘there lies a patch of blue sky which is pure Magritte’.³²⁴ If Harrison had been speaking specifically of Nash then he may have replaced Magritte with de Chirico. In 1931 de Chirico has a major exhibition at Tooth’s Galleries in London, which Nash reviews for *The Listener*. Nash writes that ‘the architectural quality in Chirico’s work which, combined with his poetic vision and personal sense of colour, gives him prominence among his contemporaries’.³²⁵ Causey claims that de Chirico interested Nash because of his ‘use of architecture as a frame for theatrical events, the site of strange, almost magical happenings’.³²⁶ In de Chirico’s paintings the geometric is often a stage for the metaphysical: *Love Song* (1914) presents the head of a Greek statue, a rubber glove pinned to a wall and a green ball, structured around the architecture of arches, windows and arcades. The strong geometric shapes that frame these objects reinforce their obscure symbolism. Nash states that abstraction is always attached to the real or symbolic world, arguing that ‘all art, whether realistic or abstraction, must have an associative appeal. It is a question of degree and of kind. A representational picture makes a direct appeal to our consciousness, our calculated knowledge and experience; but an abstract picture appeals in more devious and subtler ways, and to a possibly less conscious understanding, a more remote, perhaps unknown, experience’.³²⁷ Nash claims that any seemingly abstract arrangement is always connected

³²³ Harrison, ‘Abstract Painting in Britain in the Early 1930s’, 187.

³²⁴ Ibid., 188.

³²⁵ Nash, ‘Giorgio de Chirico’, 58-9.

³²⁶ Causey, ‘Introduction’, 9.

³²⁷ Nash, ‘Abstract Art’, 81.

to figurative, albeit unconscious, associations in the mind and never harbours its own internal meaning.

Nash's idea anticipates an argument made by his friend, the critic Herbert Read, in *Art Now* (1933). Read begins his argument by referencing a passage from Plato's *Philebus*:

I do not now intend by beauty of shapes what most people would expect, such as that of living creatures or pictures, but, for the purpose of my argument, I mean straight lines and curves and the surfaces or solid forms produced out of these by lathes and rulers and squares [...]. For I mean that these things are not beautiful relatively, like other things, but always and naturally and absolutely; and they have their proper pleasures, no way depending on the itch of desire.³²⁸

According to Read, the art described by Plato is realised two thousand years later in Cubism's break with the nineteenth-century academic notion of naturalistic painting to focus on concepts of form. Read incorrectly considers Cubism abstract, when actually the movement maintains connections to the world in its focus on the representation of three-dimensional objects on a two-dimensional plane.³²⁹ Having made this false claim, Read continues to explain that while Cubist 'abstraction' negates the physical world it does not necessarily negate the metaphysical. He argues that no one could confuse Georges Braque's painting with Fernand Léger's, for the process of 'abstraction' removes the mask of mimesis and enables the artist's personality to shine through clearly. The 'abstract' artist, 'stripping his object of all adventitious aids to expressiveness, relying solely on the formal structure that is straight lines and curves, surfaces and solid forms, is naked before the world, revealed by the exact relationships he himself has determined'.³³⁰ According to Read, 'abstraction' is an extension of the artist's psyche and, more specifically, represents

³²⁸ Read quoting Plato, *Art Now*, 73.

³²⁹ Read, *Art Now*, 72.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, 77.

the universal human desire to insert order onto chaos. Read then links this modernist impulse to the art of primitive man by quoting Wilhelm Worringer's *Form in Gothic* (1911):

His [primitive man's] artistic will did not arise from the enjoyment of the direct, sensuous perception of the object; instead he created precisely in order to subdue the torment of perception, in order to obtain *fixed conceptual* images in the place of *casual perceptual* images. Consequently his art bore a positive, almost scientific character; it was the product of a direct impulse of self-preservation, not the unrestrained luxury product of a humanity delivered from all elemental world fears.³³¹

Read explains that modern and primitive man share a similar spiritual attitude to the world. The political, economic and mental chaos in which modern man lives reduces his mind to that of the primitive, who controls his world by framing it with formal patterns. In 1931 Nash writes:

English artists, to-day, may feel the need to create something for themselves which is neither imitative nor interpretative of what is generally seen; that the inevitable reaction from the insecurity and muddle in which they live is a determination to construct, in however apparently small a space, an ordered, independent life; that in contrast to the crowd of undisciplined buildings which surround them they would make an architectural thing in paint or stone?³³²

'The Garden of Cyrus' celebrates nature's architectural design and thereby allows Nash to construct his illustrations around geometric forms while maintaining a connection to the landscape.³³³ In chapter three of 'The Garden of Cyrus' Browne undertakes a close observation of plants and argues for the repeated pattern of the quincunx within them: 'After such order stand the flowery branches in our best spread *verbascum*, and the seeds about the spicous head or torch of *thapsus barbatus*, in as fair a regularity as the circular and wreathed order will admit, which advanceth one side of the square and makes the

³³¹ Worringer quoted in Read, *Art Now*, 81.

³³² Nash, 'Nature, Life and Art', 67-8.

³³³ *The Quincunx Mystically Considered*.

same rhomboidal'.³³⁴ The year that Cassell publishes *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus* Nash writes an article discussing Karl Blossfeldt's *Art Forms in the Plant World* (1928). Blossfeldt presents photographs of plants in extreme close-up, displaying their architectural forms. Nash comments that these photographs are 'indisputable evidence of definite, sculptural order most un-wild and by no means ragged or 'free''.³³⁵ The title of Blossfeldt's work draws a comparison between nature and art that echoes Browne's statement: 'Now although this elegant ordination of vegetables, hath found coincidence or imitation in sundry works of Art, yet is it not also destitute of naturall examples, and though overlooked by all, was elegantly observable, in several works of nature'.³³⁶ Both Browne and Blossfeldt suggest that geometric perfection forms the fabric of the natural world. Nash presents a similar sentiment in a letter written to a friend in 1930, which describes the plants in his garden: 'The pinks are all flourishing in that pleasant impudent manner of pinks with bright steely leaves bristling like spears'.³³⁷ Browne and Blossfeldt help warrant Nash's desire for a more architectural aesthetic in British landscape painting. Blossfeldt's photographs oppose the picturesque style still dominating British art in the 1930s, typified by the work of Albert Ernest Bottomley. During this period Nash laments how landscape painting had thus far been somewhat confined to 'a field of buttercups and daisies with Union Jack flags fluttering at all four corners, where our painters must play the traditional game, encouraged or admonished by hearty journalists and sentimental pedagogues with megaphones'.³³⁸

The geometry of nature promises creative regeneration to the modern artist, while for Browne it is proof on earth of God's existence. Causey states: 'Browne's pursuit of

³³⁴ Browne, *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus ... with Thirty Drawings by Paul Nash. Edited with an Introduction by John Carter*, 80.

³³⁵ Nash, 'Photography and Modern Art', 77-8.

³³⁶ Browne, *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus ... with Thirty Drawings by Paul Nash. Edited with an Introduction by John Carter*, 79.

³³⁷ Sir Edward Marsh, Enid Marx, Henry Moore, Mrs. George Mortimer, Mrs. J. N. Macdonald, Barbara Nash, Claire Neilson, n.d., TAM 38.5, Paul Nash Collection, Tate Archive, London.

³³⁸ Nash, 'Photography and Modern Art', 78.

the quincunx in nature is explicable because it is the geometrical aspect of nature that signals the natural world's closeness to the godhead'.³³⁹ In *Religio Medici* Browne claims that the book of nature is God's message, written onto the fabric of the world for all to read. He states that 'this visible world is but a picture of the invisible, wherein as in a portrait, things are not truly, but in equivocal shapes, and as they counterfeit some more real substance in that invisible fabrick'.³⁴⁰ Throughout 'The Garden of Cyrus' Browne stresses that there is an underlying design to the world in which God's presence on earth resides and he suggests that humankind should seek out this design in order to allay the chaos of life and connect with Him.³⁴¹ I argue that the architectural strength informing Nash's illustration *Mansions of the Dead* (fig. 29) positions the artist as God in an age when God is dead. Browne prefigures this usurpation:

To speak yet more narrowly, there was never any thing ugly or mis-shapen but the chaos; wherein, notwithstanding, to speak strictly, there was no deformity, because no form, nor was it yet impregnate by the voice of God. Now nature is not at variance with art, nor art with nature; they being both the servants of his providence. Art is the perfection of nature. Were the world now as it was the sixth day, there were yet a chaos. Nature hath made one world, and art another. In brief, all things are artificial; for nature is the art of God.³⁴²

The modern artist replaces God in *Mansions of the Dead*, which presents an aerial backdrop of clouds before three grids that are suspended from a network of cables. A web of grids and cables divides the 'heavenly' scene and within this geometrical framework four lamella-like 'souls' reside.³⁴³ These fragile creatures are encircled by flat white discs, which protect them. Townsend links Nash's illustration with Browne's allusion to the Lord's

³³⁹ Causey, *Paul Nash: Landscape and the Life of Objects*, 37.

³⁴⁰ Browne, 'Religio Medici', 16.

³⁴¹ 'All things began in order, so they shall end, and so they shall begin again; according to the ordainer of order and mysticall Mathematicks of the City of Heaven'. Browne, *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus ... with Thirty Drawings by Paul Nash. Edited with an Introduction by John Carter*, 122.

³⁴² Browne, 'Religio Medici', 23.

³⁴³ Townsend, 'We are Making a New World': Death, Modernity and Order in Paul Nash', forthcoming 2015.

Prayer. Browne writes: ‘But look not so high as heaven ... observable rudiments there are hereof in subterraneous concretions, and bodies in the earth’.³⁴⁴ Townsend suggests that *Mansions of the Dead* inverts the ‘desire that divine agency might be ‘on Earth, as it is in Heaven’. In 1932, it seems, things are in heaven as they are on modern earth’.³⁴⁵ I argue that the modern artist occupies heaven, which has become a celestial studio where he or she structures the world around ‘lathes and rulers and squares’.³⁴⁶ Townsend states that the grids in *Mansions of the Dead* resemble pre-fabricated apartment buildings, being swung into place by an enormous crane positioned in infinity.³⁴⁷ The architectural scene looks remarkably similar to Nash’s oil painting *Northern Adventure* (1929), which shows a network of scaffolding standing outside the St Pancras Hotel in London. Interestingly, a displaced window is positioned in the back right hand corner of the painting and its gridded bars frame a patch of blue sky that suggests the aerial scene in *Mansions of the Dead*. This links the geometrics of the illustration to the architecture of the modern city and reinforces Nash’s claim that ‘abstraction’ always has an ‘associative appeal’.³⁴⁸ Gerard Hopkins argues that the architecture of *Mansions of the Dead* derives from the artist’s own private sphere, depicting not only what Nash ‘sees with the eye but what he feels with the soul. He offers to the observer a private world, so honest, so unmistakable, that he can never trace a line that does not belong to some part of it’.³⁴⁹ Hopkins echoes Read’s comment that ‘the science of art is finally the science of human psychology’.³⁵⁰ Causey similarly suggests that the architecture in *Mansions of the Dead* represents something

³⁴⁴ Browne, *Urne Buriall and the Garden of Cyrus ... with Thirty Drawings by Paul Nash. Edited with an Introduction by John Carter*, 79.

³⁴⁵ Townsend, ‘We are Making a New World’: Death, Modernity and Order in Paul Nash’, forthcoming 2015.

³⁴⁶ Read, *Art Now*, 73.

³⁴⁷ Townsend, ‘We are Making a New World’: Death, Modernity and Order in Paul Nash’, forthcoming 2015.

³⁴⁸ Nash, ‘Abstract Art’, 81.

³⁴⁹ Eight Draft Articles About Paul Nash, Some with Titles Inscribed in his Hand, 1926-1933, TGA 7050/3919, Paul Nash Collection, Tate Archive, London.

³⁵⁰ Read, *Art Now*, 80.

entirely personal to Nash by relating the illustration to *Month of March*.³⁵¹ As stated, Causey links the ladder in *Month of March* to the biblical story of Jacob, who dreams of a ladder that connects heaven and earth. Appropriately, the trapezoidal forms between the rungs on the ladder mirror the shape of the clouds in the sky. I suggest that the geometrical symmetry between the ladder and clouds symbolises ascension for Nash in the wake of his father's recent death. *Mansions of the Dead* reveals a similar sort of symbolism in its connection to this part of Browne's text: 'Before *Plato* could speak, the soul had wings in *Homer*, which fell not, but flew out of the body into the mansions of the dead'.³⁵² Browne's prose invests the semi-abstract illustration with metaphysical meaning and the image of the soul leaving the body fits neatly into the connections Nash makes between death, sky and salvation in paintings like *Month of March* and *Landscape at Iden*. In *Mansions of the Dead* these connections are emphasised by the cruciform lamella-like souls that represent theta and indeed have Christophanic overtones. Their horizontal lines represent the body and mortality, while the circle represents perfection and immortality. Theta illustrates a connection between heaven and earth and suggests the transference between the secular and sublime in the Lord's Prayer.

The straight lines and circles that represent the souls in *Mansions of the Dead* reflect de Chirico's tendency to use architecture as a frame for 'magical events'.³⁵³ However, other illustrations in *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus* present stark differences with de Chirico's paintings and forecast Nash's waning interest in arranging his work around strong architectural forms. I highlight differences between the two artists by comparing de Chirico's painting *Ariadne* (1913, fig. 30) with Nash's illustration *The Opened Tomb*. De Chirico presents Ariadne as a statue, paralysed and isolated in an Italian piazza. Ariadne was the daughter of Minos, King of Crete, and recognised as the island's Greek goddess.

³⁵¹ Causey, *Paul Nash: Landscape and the Life of Objects*, 93.

³⁵² Browne, *Urne Buriall and the Garden of Cyrus ... with Thirty Drawings by Paul Nash. Edited with an Introduction by John Carter*, 37.

³⁵³ Causey, 'Introduction', 9.

Ariadne was in love with Theseus, who she assisted in slaying her half brother, the Minotaur. After the Minotaur's defeat the couple fled to the island of Naxos, where Theseus abandoned Ariadne and left her to the passions of Dionysus.³⁵⁴ De Chirico paints Ariadne alone as Theseus sailed away on a ship in the background. The painting's perspective is exaggerated, so that the ground appears on an incline and pushes Ariadne's plinth forward. Arcades line the right-hand side of the painting and cast a rectangular shadow over the composition that almost reaches Ariadne. This large shadow is echoed in a smaller one cast by her plinth, causing the breadth of the composition to be dominated by rectangular structures and their dark shadows, which resemble coffins. Cathy Gere claims that the strange mausoleum-like building in the back-centre of the painting pervades the scene with a sense of death.³⁵⁵ Ariadne wraps one arm above her head, one leg is slightly arched and her head is tilted languidly to the side. This introspective pose has been linked to Ariadne since at least the early sixteenth century, when Pope Julius II acquired the statue *Sleeping Ariadne* for the Vatican. Ariadne's introspection is amplified by her isolation in the piazza. Gere claims that de Chirico's Ariadne series contains a 'claustrophobic emptiness' that can be associated with the artist's understanding of Nietzsche.³⁵⁶ De Chirico's early writings reveal his interest in the philosopher's ideas on preclassical Greece:

Then during a trip I made to Rome in October, after having read the works of Friedrich Nietzsche, I became aware that there is a host of strange, unknown, solitary things which can be translated into painting. I meditated a long time [...]. Then I understood certain vague sensations which I had previously been unable to explain. The language that the things of the world seem to speak; the seasons of the year and the hours of the day. The epochs of history too: prehistory, and the revolutions in thought throughout the ages, modern times – all appeared strange and distant.³⁵⁷

³⁵⁴ Her sorrowful abandonment is poeticised in Ovid's *Heroids*. Ovid, *Heroids*, 90.

³⁵⁵ Gere, *Knossos and the Prophets of Modernism*, 101.

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

³⁵⁷ De Chirico, 'Appendix A: Manuscript from the Collection of the Late Paul Eluard', 246.

Ariadne represents a distant and lifeless past. This is emphasised by the steam train that powers through the back of the composition and is separated from the inactive figure by a brick wall. Ariadne's rigor mortis is reflected in the regimented rectangles and arches that surround her. This thesis traces Nash's gradual move away from formal concerns, which he increasingly felt constricted life. In contrast to *Ariadne*, *The Opened Tomb* expresses the continuing life of the ancients. Despite its skeletal state, the figure in Nash's illustration still lives because its hair continues to grow. The coffin divides the illustration into the conventional parameters of landscape painting, two thirds of which present the earth and the other third the sky. The sky suggests the soul's ascension and therefore represents continuing life, which has already been suggested by the growing hair. At the bottom of the composition earth and sky meet in a patch of brown colour, emphasising the ambiguity of the soul's secular or sacred situation. *The Opened Tomb* indicates that the dead have not yet come to rest and this sense of continuation opposes Ariadne's stasis. I argue that the idea of life after death promoted by Nash was influenced by Browne's statement that some 'graves will be opened before they be quite closed, and *Lazarus* be no wonder'.³⁵⁸

Resurrection

At the end of chapter three in 'Urne Buriall' Browne discusses the relationship between the buried body and its spiritual ascension. He describes the physical changes, or lack thereof, of an interred body: 'For since bones afford not only rectitude and stability, but figure unto the body; it is no impossible Physiognomy to conjecture at fleshy appendencies; and after what shape the muscles and carnous parts might hang in their full consistencies'.³⁵⁹ At this point in the text Browne reinforces the corporeal certainty of his subject by using words like 'fat', 'hardest', 'coagulated', and 'lumps'.³⁶⁰ He conjures a

³⁵⁸ Browne, *Urne Buriall and the Garden of Cyrus ... with Thirty Drawings by Paul Nash. Edited with an Introduction by John Carter*, 52.

³⁵⁹ Ibid., 34.

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

monument to the past that is as steadfast as *Ariadne*. However, a previous statement threatens this solidity: 'Bodies in the same ground do not uniformly dissolve, nor bones equally moulder'.³⁶¹ Undermining his claim for the stability of bones, Browne suggests that variations in skeletal decay are moral indicators of the deceased: '*Dantes* Characters are to be found in skulls as well as faces'.³⁶² Furthermore, the state of a person's physical remains signals their fate in the afterlife: 'And since the dimensions of the head measure the whole body, and the figure thereof gives conjecture of the principall faculties; Physiognomy outlives our selves, and ends not in our graves'.³⁶³ Nash accompanies Browne's statement with a small illustration, which I name *Juglers* (fig. 31), depicting his own face and skull. The skull appears upside down at the top of the illustration and connects to Nash's upward face via a single bone. Face, skull and bone are precisely an inch in length and thereby signify Browne's claim that the skull's measurements inform the proportions of a person's entire body.³⁶⁴ From three bones and a skull, Nash fleshes out the face and draws the shoulders. To illustrate the physical precision that Browne discusses, Nash keeps the pencil lines that mark out these measurements. This physicality is transformed into spirituality via pencil lines that form a cross over Nash's eye and indicate the resurrection of his soul. The combination of material and spiritual elements is further emphasised by the separate backgrounds of earth and air, with the former framing Nash's face and the latter framing his skull. As with *The Opened Tomb*, Nash's figure is positioned between the aerial and underground world, which again expresses the notion that the dead have not yet come to rest. In the illustration a bone balances precariously on Nash's chin and injects the illustration with an unsustainable sense of poise. Unlike *Ariadne*, who looks fixed forever in her melancholy position, Nash's figure is yet to rest. It motions towards the Last Judgement, as Browne closes his chapter by stating that 'their bones or bodies be after translated by Angels into the field of *Ezechiels* vision, or as some

³⁶¹ Ibid.

³⁶² Ibid.

³⁶³ Ibid., 35.

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

will order it, into the Valley of Judgement, or *Jehosaphat*.³⁶⁵ Claire Preston notes that these two valleys are metaphorical places. The former is never geographically specified, while the latter imagines the northern tip of the Dead Sea as an arena of genocide and subsequent paradise.³⁶⁶ Preston states: 'Whatever this translation amounts to, Browne has moved away from notions of physical relocation of relics and into a territory of imagined, prophesied, and wholly fictive geography'.³⁶⁷ Browne begins his argument on solid ground, discussing the physical changes of the interred body, and finishes with conjecture on the spiritual afterlife.

Barbour suggests that physical evidence grows increasingly remote as 'Urne Buriall' proceeds and he describes the 'utter negation of creatural existence or the dissolution of the self into the numinous evoked in Browne's final return to a conditional in *Hydriotaphia*'.³⁶⁸ Towards the end of 'Urne Buriall' Browne celebrates the termination of bodily existence: 'And if any have been so happy as truly to understand Christian annihilation, extasis, exolution, liquefaction, transformation, the kisse of the Spouse, gustation of God, and ingression into the divine shadow, they have already had an handsome anticipation of heaven; the glory of the world is surely over, and the earth in ashes unto them'.³⁶⁹ Browne's rejection of the corporeal can be understood within the context of early modern perceptions of the body and soul, where the former is perceived as a site of spiritual dissolution that is bound to mortality and decay. Jonathan Sawdy states:

The body's refusal to obey, its ability to fracture the supposed desire of the soul towards communion with God, and its recalcitrant and rebellious longing for physical and sensual existence, delineates the battle-lines between material and immaterial existence, as well as between subject and

³⁶⁵ Ibid., 36.

³⁶⁶ Preston, *Thomas Browne and the Writing of Early Modern Science*, 135.

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

³⁶⁸ Barbour, *Sir Thomas Browne: A Life*, 352.

³⁶⁹ Browne, *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus ... with Thirty Drawings by Paul Nash. Edited with an Introduction by John Carter*, 52-3.

object in grammatical sense [...]. 'Mastery' over the body, the conquering of its desires, the endless war against the ravages of sin, or 'soul-sickness', is a feature of early-modern culture which provides the determining framework in which the body's internal dimensions were to be understood.³⁷⁰

As a physician it is Browne's intention to keep 'men out of their Urnes' while, contradictorily, as a prose writer he seems to aim to get rid of the body.³⁷¹ Nash appears to share Browne's latter intentions. As stated, Nash rarely depicts people in his paintings and instead anthropomorphises the landscape, so that trees, standing stones and earthworks become endowed with human presence. In the early 1940s, as his illness worsened, Nash starts to reject terrestrial life and turns his attention to the sky. In *Flight of the Magnolia* (1944, fig. 32) human life resides within a floating flower about to bloom in the sky, far above the sun. The magnolia's transient state and suspended situation suggest the amorphous nature of the soul in its ascension to heaven. I argue that this flower is forecast by the figures in Nash's illustrations for *Urne Burial and The Garden of Cyrus*, which follow Browne's creatural negation and are images of skeletons or souls rather than fleshed-out human bodies. The figures in *Ghosts* and *Sorrow* have the soul-like immateriality that Browne discusses in *Religio Medici*:

[There is] no organ or instrument for the rational soul; for in the brain, which we term the seat of reason, there is not anything of moment more than I can discover in the carny of a beast: and this is a sensible and no inconsiderable argument of the inorganity of the soul, at least in that sense we usually so receive it. Thus we are men, and we know not how; there is something in us that can be without us, and will be after us, though it is strange that it hath no history what it was before us, nor cannot tell how it entered in us.³⁷²

³⁷⁰ Sawdy, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture*, 20.

³⁷¹ Browne, *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus ... with Thirty Drawings by Paul Nash. Edited with an Introduction by John Carter*, 4.

³⁷² Browne, 'Religio Medici', 55.

The faceless, transparent and wavering figure gliding down the stairs in *Ghosts* represents the 'inorganicity of the soul'.³⁷³ The surrounding jellyfish, water and clouds reflect this discarnate figure and reinforce the intangibility of Browne's fundamental concern, which is the soul's resurrection.

The elusiveness of Browne's subject is emphasised by the form of his discourse, which flits from one conjecture to another and willingly contradicts itself. Barbour states that 'Browne's sometimes fragmentary, sometimes sonorous prose offers no single or static message about the ways in which ritual, art and rhetoric mediate the traumas of human life in general and of the English 1650s in particular'.³⁷⁴ Browne continually undermines his own arguments. For example, his assertion that bones are 'not like to erre [wander] in the Topography of their Resurrection', opposes his introductory claim that they 'may seem to have wandered far'.³⁷⁵ The discourse of 'Urne Buriall' moves swiftly back and forth, denying certainty. Preston states: 'His more characteristic manner consists of rhythms rather than shapes, of a developing, evolving narrative of contemplation rather than syntactically highlighted *aperçu* or adages. It is a style notable especially for mutually contradictory, or completely absent, connectives'.³⁷⁶ The distinction between rhythms and shapes can also be made between *The Opened Tomb* and *Ariadne*. The lightness of the former's brushstrokes, alongside the intermingling of earth and air, produces a sense of motion that thoroughly opposes the latter's compartmentalised solidity. Preston recognises how the rhythm of Browne's prose, which refuses to give weight to any one of his contradicting remarks, indicates his opposition to received authority.³⁷⁷ With regards to antiquity, this transforms all knowledge of the past into conjecture. 'Urne Buriall' begins as an antiquarian enquiry based on hard evidence and

³⁷³ Ibid.

³⁷⁴ Barbour, *Sir Thomas Browne: A Life*, 350-1.

³⁷⁵ Browne, *Urne Buriall and the Garden of Cyrus ... with Thirty Drawings by Paul Nash. Edited with an Introduction by John Carter*, 36 and 3.

³⁷⁶ Preston, *Thomas Browne and the Writing of Early Modern Science*, 133.

³⁷⁷ Ibid., 135.

develops into speculation on funerary rites and their value. Browne's increasing disregard for fact is highlighted by Nash's illustrations. Beginning with urns and grave-goods, Nash's artefacts turn to smoke in chapter three by the burning of the *Funeral Pyre*. At this point, Nash's illustrations move from the earth to the air and signify the text's transition from fact to lofty conjecture. This uplifting approach to the past appears antithetical to de Chirico's heavy solemnity. Nash demonstrates his playfulness in a draft of *Juglers*, which includes, in pencil, these lines from 'Urne Buriall': 'Antiquity held too light thoughts from Objects of mortality, while some drew provocatives of mirth from Anatomies, and Juglers shewed tricks with Skeletons; when Fiddlers made not so pleasant mirth as Fencers, and men could sit with quiet stomacks while hanging was played before them'.³⁷⁸ In this draft illustration Nash becomes the juggler of his own bones and a jesting treatment of mortality is emphasised. It would be incorrect to claim that Nash presents a jovial approach to death but he and Browne offer both morbid and hopeful perspectives that mirror the dual character of the urns as 'dreary and sad and yet raised from the earth and pieced together'.³⁷⁹ The illustrations for *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus* present a sense of optimism based on a notion of resurrection, which I claim underlies most of Nash's work on mortality. I argue that in the manner of Browne, Nash sees the past as a site for regeneration. In the coming years he develops this vision through his engagement with Avebury, which he promotes as a prototype for the contemporary art group Unit One.

³⁷⁸ Browne, *Urne Buriall and the Garden of Cyrus ... with Thirty Drawings by Paul Nash. Edited with an Introduction by John Carter*, 28.

³⁷⁹ Preston, *Thomas Browne and the Writing of Early Modern Science*, 137.

Chapter Two

Avebury and Design

In this chapter I argue for a connection between the Neolithic and the twentieth century in Nash's mind by demonstrating how his engagement with the prehistoric site of Avebury altered his ideas on contemporary art. This becomes manifest in the stark difference between the paintings Nash submitted for the *Unit One Catalogue* (1934), which were all conceived before 1932, and his written entry for it, which was probably composed in early 1934. The British rural landscape is absent from the paintings, which are set in aerial spaces, cities or artists' studios.³⁸⁰ In contrast, Nash's text centres on the ancient aspects of the Wiltshire landscape, closing with a discussion of Avebury's formal composition.³⁸¹ I argue that Nash's first visit to the site in 1933 reinforced the connections between architectural design and the rural landscape that he had been making since the 1910s.³⁸² I examine how this connection was further reinforced by concerns in the 1930s with the state of Britain's rural landscape, articulated particularly by The Council for the Preservation of Rural England (CPRE). While Nash's engagement with Browne had encouraged his investigation of architectural strength within metaphysical places, Avebury allowed him to place the geometric within a specific locale.³⁸³ I argue that Stukeley's *Abury*, which Nash received from Neilson in the summer of 1934, strengthened this modern yet pastoral vision, and helped push it into a romantically surreal terrain. To begin, I outline Nash's initial encounter with the Neolithic site and highlight the connections he made between it and his conceptions of 'good' design.

³⁸⁰ *Aerial Composition* (1933), *Northern Adventure* (1929) and *Studio* (1929).

³⁸¹ Nash, 'Contribution to *Unit One*', 109-10.

³⁸² See *The Cherry Orchard* (1917).

³⁸³ See *Equivalents for the Megaliths* (1935).

In the summer of 1933 Nash travelled to Avebury on a bus from Marlborough with his friend Ruth Clark and was struck by the site's architectural design.³⁸⁴ Avebury consists of a mile-long avenue of standing stones called the West Kennet Avenue, which leads to a stone circle that measures four hundred and thirty metres at its diameter. The circle is protected by four ditch-quadrants, which have a total length of around one hundred and forty-three metres. At one time the circle included over one hundred stones. However, when Nash first visited Avebury, before its reconstruction, only fifteen stones stood upright in the circle. Two of these remaining stones are noticeably larger than the others and they stand together to form part of what Stukeley called 'the Cove'. One of the stones has a height of about seven metres and, weighing around one hundred tonnes, is by far the heaviest standing stone in the British Isles. The Cove's impressive structure can be clearly seen from the road and must have struck Nash as he entered Avebury from the southeast side on the bus from Marlborough. The Avenue and circle are part of a collection of other ancient sites, including Silbury Hill, the largest prehistoric mound in Europe, and the West Kennet Long Barrow, one of the longest burial mounds in the British Isles. It is difficult to know the extent to which Nash was aware of the Avebury complex in 1933, but the importance of the site's design may have been emphasised to him when he lunched with Robert Byron during the trip. Byron had recently published *The Appreciation of Architecture* (1932), which praised Istanbul's St Sophia: 'In every detail, and in the relation of all details, speak balance, ratio, and the refinement of each particle of stone to an *exact purpose* [my italics]'.³⁸⁵ With a similar sentiment to Byron, Nash found the principle of 'intelligent purpose' at Avebury.³⁸⁶ He described the site:

Imagine a monument so immense as Avebury; the prodigious, circular bank and dyke, the great circle of standing stones one hundred in number, sometimes twenty-seven feet apart, comprising an area of twenty-eight acres. Two smaller circles within, and an avenue without, fifty-three feet

³⁸⁴ Nash's enthusiasm for Avebury's architectural design was expressed in an article for *Architectural Record* called 'A Characteristic' (1937).

³⁸⁵ Byron, *The Appreciation of Architecture*, 56.

³⁸⁶ Nash, 'A Characteristic', 135.

wide, stretching away over the hills to an extent of two hundred monoliths, seventy feet apart. This huge primitive complex, with its circles and avenues and its mighty gleaming pyramid of chalk, should have been one of the architectural wonders of the earth.³⁸⁷

Nash stated that Avebury was long thought of as natural because such formal strength was not believed to have originated in ‘quaint’ England, which was dominated by a picturesque aesthetic. He stressed that these ‘things do happen in England, quite naturally, but they are not recognised for what they are - works of art. Identical with the intimate spirit inhabiting these gentle fields yet not the work of chance or elements, but directed by an *intelligent purpose*, ruled by an *authentic vision* [my italics]’.³⁸⁸ In the early 1930s Nash was concerned with the nature of ‘good’ design and, I argue, saw Avebury as a prehistoric prototype for this concern.³⁸⁹ I now discuss Nash’s engagement with design in order to describe the context within which he first perceived Avebury.

At the start of the 1930s many fine-artists moved into areas of the applied arts. Andrew Stephenson links this to the economic slump that ran from ca.1929-34. In a time of financial hardship commercial work was a surer means of income than modernist painting, which had an already fragile market in Britain.³⁹⁰ Stephenson states that ‘Paul Nash, [Ben] Nicholson, [Barbara] Hepworth, [Edward] Burra, [John] Bigge and [John] Armstrong moved into commercial illustration, poster design and interior decoration. John Nash produced gardening illustrations, Bigge and [Edward] Wadsworth moved into the decoration of ocean liners. Burra and Armstrong designed sets for the theatre’.³⁹¹ Nash claimed that ‘to estimate the sum of [artistic] talent at the present time, it will not be adequate simply to comb the studios and the dealers’ basements: you must search

³⁸⁷ Ibid.

³⁸⁸ Ibid.

³⁸⁹ For a comprehensive account of Nash’s design work see Brian Webb and Peyton Skipwith’s *Design: Paul Nash and John Nash* (2008).

³⁹⁰ Stephenson, ‘“Strategies of Situation”: British Modernism and the Slump c.1929-1934’, 30.

³⁹¹ Ibid., 41.

hoardings, the walls of tubes, windows of shops, pages of newspapers; in fact, almost all printed matter'.³⁹² In 1930 Nash entered a competition in *The Architectural Review* to design rooms in Lord Benbow's apartment. He won the second prize of £50 with his sports-themed living/dining room. Nash transformed the fireplace into a football goal and designed the rug as a tennis court. He made the door into rugby posts and placed a tennis ball by the telephone. A netted screen partitioned off the dining room, which contained a drinks cabinet designed like a boat. The judge kindly ridiculed the sports theme as 'faintly ridiculous', but the exaggerated geometric structures of netting and goal posts set the tone for Nash's strong architectural designs of the early 1930s.³⁹³ The sports-themed living room also provided an association with the sporting body, which contemporary critics often described as beautiful and efficient like the key aspects of 'good' design.³⁹⁴ The judge commended Nash's entry for showing 'truer architectural quality than any other submitted [...]'. Taking very simple motifs, like the cylindrical light fittings and the square frames of picture and partition, it builds up by means of combination, repetition, and contrasts a subtle fugue-like organisation in which the planes of the walls play their part'.³⁹⁵ Nash's efficient, architectural designs continued in his textiles, book jackets, posters, and in the glass bathroom that Edward James commissioned for his wife, the dancer Tilly Losch, in 1932.

Nash was at the forefront of the artists' move into design in 1930s Britain. Between 1932 and 1935 he was president of the Society for Industrial Artists and wrote numerous articles for *The Listener* and *Week-end Review* that discussed the close relationship

³⁹² Nash, 'New Draughtsman', 24.

³⁹³ Anon, 'Lord Benbow's Apartments', 202.

³⁹⁴ Anthony Bertram paralleled the athletic body with good design: 'And surely those young people, exercising their own taste in choosing pleasant costumes, getting themselves fit and being happy in that most delightful way, and doing it all in a clean, light, athletic building, are being, in the true sense, educated'. Bertram, *Design*, 52.

³⁹⁵ Anon, 'Lord Benbow's Apartments', 202.

between modern art and industry.³⁹⁶ Nash stressed that manufacturers could learn a great deal from artists and that artists should be utilised as a national resource. However, he warned that when art and industry combine the artist is commonly subordinated and industry dominates. Nash pleaded that ‘immediate need is not so much for a belated, indiscriminate employment of artists by producers as for the foundation of a school for the representative of industry. If we are to have a school for art critics, why not an art education for buyers?’³⁹⁷ Nash believed that the nation should be educated in the appreciation of ‘good’ design. His pedagogic idea echoed the ethos of the CPRE, which was set up in 1926 to advise local authorities against the tentacular spread of housing developments.³⁹⁸ In the CPRE publication *Britain and the Beast* (1937) H. J. Massingham lamented the ruin of village life since the eighteenth century, when urbanisation sprawled imprudently into the countryside and people began to work in the towns rather than the fields.³⁹⁹ The CPRE typified the interwar reverence for the rural. The economic and political importance of rural Britain had been in serious decline since the industrial revolution, as the population transferred their labour from agriculture to industry. Alun Howkins explains that in ‘the years before 1901 the rural population had declined by about 12 per cent. This followed a long-term trend’.⁴⁰⁰ Around 1870 British agriculture had fallen into a long depression, which can be partially attributed to transport developments that allowed the cheap production of crops in America and India to be exported around the world. An article from 1897 lamented that when ‘perishable fruits like plums and peaches, raised in California, are sold in Liverpool, it is evident that the element of distance between the producer and the consumer of agricultural products is

³⁹⁶ These article are ‘Advertising and Contemporary Art’ (1932); ‘The Artist and the Community’ (1932); ‘The Artist in the House’ (1932); ‘The Artist and Industry’ (1932); ‘Modern English Textiles I’ (1932) and ‘Modern English Textiles II’ (1932).

³⁹⁷ Nash, ‘The Artist and Industry’, 81.

³⁹⁸ One CPRE text stated that ‘education all round is wanted – in Landscape Design, in appreciation of the Country and in a detailed Survey of its features’. Abercrombie, *The Preservation of Rural England, etc.*, 44.

³⁹⁹ Massingham, ‘Our Inheritance from the Past’, 8-31.

⁴⁰⁰ Howkins, *The Death of Rural England: A Social History of the Countryside Since 1900*, 8.

practically annihilated'.⁴⁰¹ Unable to withstand global competition, agricultural labour in Britain declined and as a result the countryside became an increasingly neglected landscape. This neglect was compounded by competition from the burgeoning manufacturing and service economies, which enticed workers away from the country and into the towns and cities.⁴⁰² As rural life diminished in reality, it was nostalgically revived in the urban imagination as an idyllic cluster of picturesque churches and village greens. As Raymond Williams states: 'On the country has gathered the idea of a natural way of life: of peace, innocence, and simple virtue'.⁴⁰³ The virtue associated with the rural can be contrasted with the notion of urban degeneracy. Howkins traces the latter to nineteenth-century ideas of the British Empire, which developed out of a classical education regarding ancient Rome.⁴⁰⁴ Howkins explains that Edward Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776) described how 'a great Empire, overextended, hugely wealthy and relying increasingly on native and colonial peoples to maintain its wealth, was destroyed because of decay at the centre [Rome]'.⁴⁰⁵ London was the commercial and political centre of the British Empire and, in succession to Rome, was generally perceived to be rotten in the early twentieth century. If London provoked the 'moral and physical decay' of the British race, then the countryside was the nation's saviour.⁴⁰⁶ It was largely believed that the people of Britain needed to return to village life if degeneracy was to be avoided. The return to the rural took many forms, 'ranging from the rediscovery of British traditional music and folklore to garden cities; from schemes of peasant proprietorship to the invention of a vernacular style in architecture'.⁴⁰⁷ The poetry of Hilaire Belloc and Edward Thomas added to the vision of Britain as an

⁴⁰¹ Anon, 'Agricultural Depression', 218.

⁴⁰² Perren, *Agriculture in Depression, 1870-1940*, 6.

⁴⁰³ Williams, *The Country and the City*, 1.

⁴⁰⁴ Howkins, 'The Discovery of Rural England', 65.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁶ Howkins, *The Death of Rural England: A Social History of the Countryside Since 1900*, 25.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid.

essentially rural landscape dotted with thatched cottages, babbling streams and country churches.⁴⁰⁸ In 1914 Thomas described the village of Berwick St. James:

The church tower peered up on the right, with a mill bestriding the stream: on the left a white house and blossoming fruit trees stood somewhat apart in their enclosure of white mud wall. The sky all over was dim, the thin white clouds showing the blue behind them. The street ending in the “Boot” inn was a perfect neat one of flint and stone chequer and thatch.⁴⁰⁹

In the 1920s and 1930s many former city-dwellers felt they could get closer to the rural idyll by moving to the suburbs. However, for the CPRE this urban exodus threatened to destroy the landscapes described by Belloc and Thomas. Suburbia was the preservationist’s most constant battle, as speculative builders ‘took land out of agriculture and built houses. Their [the CPRE’s] most hated places were the arterial roads out of London with their ribbon development’.⁴¹⁰ What had once been a green and pleasant land was now, in J. B. Priestley’s words, ‘a wilderness of dirty bricks’.⁴¹¹ *Britain and the Beast* reinforced a popular image of urbanisation as a spreading monster.⁴¹² The book contains a photograph of Stonehenge accompanied by: ‘A dawn or a sunset? In our current civilisation it may be either’.⁴¹³ *Britain and the Beast* identifies Stonehenge as a pillar of national identity to be preserved from the urban beast threatening to subsume everything. Stonehenge and Avebury, as monuments to ancient myth and religion, represent the reverence that many CPRE members had for the British landscape. David Matless explains how the preservationist Vaughan Cornish regarded:

Nature as suffused with Divine Immanence, landscape was for him a literal object of worship. Cornish frequently termed himself, and those

⁴⁰⁸ Belloc, ‘South Country’, 36-7.

⁴⁰⁹ Thomas, *In Pursuit of Spring*, 146-7.

⁴¹⁰ Howkins, *The Death of Rural England: A Social History of the Countryside Since 1900*, 109.

⁴¹¹ Priestley, *English Journey: Being a Rambling but Truthful Account of What One Man Saw and Heard and Felt and Thought During a Journey Through England During the Autumn of the Year 1933*, 400.

⁴¹² The sprawl of housing developments was appropriately termed ‘the octopus’ by Clough Williams Ellis in *England and the Octopus* (1928).

⁴¹³ Dixon-Scott, ‘Stonehenge’, 295.

who might follow him, a 'Pilgrim of Scenery'. Pilgrim though not only stood for reverence and devotion. It carried a promise of fulfilment approaching the ecstatic, yet also a rein of humility, much as the national park would be for Cornish a site of the mystic but not hedonistic, not a place of abandon but rather a humbling arena which would prevent 'our people' losing that sense of the true proportion between civilisation and the cosmos which is essential to the religious welfare of a Nation.⁴¹⁴

The CPRE's 'religious' worship of the landscape made prehistoric ceremonial sites, such as Stonehenge and Avebury, perfect monuments for their preservationist cause. In many respects the CPRE appeared thoroughly regressive and demonstrated how it 'was easier to attack the new developments than to be precise about the desired aesthetic alternative'.⁴¹⁵ However, the organisation claimed that it was not shirking from the modern world with a nostalgic favouring of a bygone era but was looking for the creation of new beauty.⁴¹⁶ Priestley acknowledged the comparable improvements brought about by industrialisation when he stated that you 'do not hurry out of Arcadia to work in a factory twelve hours a day for about eighteen pence'.⁴¹⁷ Similarly, Bertram described the grossly unfair tendency to mix up the CPRE 'with the sort of arid conservatism which tries to mummify the countryside, which automatically opposes all innovations, all new design, all demolition and reconstruction. If any such people hide under the cloak of the CPRE they have certainly no right there'.⁴¹⁸

Like the CPRE, Nash linked contemporary design and the rural landscape as he equated ancient sites like Avebury with current celebrations of 'structural purpose'.⁴¹⁹ Nash was connected to the preservationist society through his *Dorset: Shell Guide* (1935), which was dedicated to the CPRE and begged its readers to work on the organisation's

⁴¹⁴ Matless, 'The English Outlook: A Mapping of Leisure, 1918-1939', 30.

⁴¹⁵ Lowerson, 'Battles for the Countryside', 266.

⁴¹⁶ Abercrombie, *The Preservation of Rural England, etc.*, 44.

⁴¹⁷ Priestley, *English Journey: Being a Rambling but Truthful Account of What One Man Saw and Heard and Felt and Thought During a Journey Through England During the Autumn of the Year 1933*, 400.

⁴¹⁸ Bertram, *Design*, 110.

⁴¹⁹ Nash, 'A Characteristic', 135.

behalf 'by writing or speaking against the frequent attempts on the part of jerry-builders and those bodies which attempt to absorb whole tracts of the open countryside for their more or less destructive activities'.⁴²⁰ Nash can be seen to have previously shown preservationist support through *Rye Marshes* (1932, fig. 33), which was a poster designed for the oil company Shell as they worked in close association with the CPRE. Shell's advertisements were an example of modern art reaching a mass audience in interwar Britain. Their posters, produced by artists like Vanessa Bell, E. McKnight Kauffer, Graham Sutherland and Ben Nicholson, travelled the length of England on the side of petrol lorries. This meant that in innumerable county districts, with no easily accessible art galleries, they were the main example of modern art and design to be seen. In 1935 *The Hull Daily Mail* praised Shell's campaign:

There is little wrong with the cultural state of an age which finds nothing incongruous in the sight of a work of art pasted on the side of a petrol lorry. And that is a particular instance of an admirable modern tendency – to release art from the orthodox bondage of the galleries and bring it to the actual life of the people [...]. The pictures with which they [Shell] decorate the sides of their lorries are, first and foremost, works by some of the best of the moderns. They draw their advertising vale more from this fact than from the slogans which accompany them. In several instances the work has been completed and exhibited before the firm obtained it for their travelling 'galleries'.⁴²¹

These travelling galleries gained momentum in 1928 as Shell had come under pressure from the CPRE's *Save the Countryside Exhibition*, which showed the glories of rural Britain ruined by the introduction of petrol pumps and advertising. As the preservationist discourse became popular, Shell risked regular attacks from the environmentally aware middle classes to whom they were advertising. In late 1929 Shell decided to remove nearly eighteen thousand advertisement hoardings and cancelled the contracts for a further eleven thousand.⁴²² As the oil company tried to satisfy the CPRE their campaigns

⁴²⁰ Nash, *Dorset: Shell Guide*, 44.

⁴²¹ 'Art Posters for Lorries', *The Hull Daily Mail*, April 8, 1935.

⁴²² Hewitt, 'The 'Nature' and 'Art' of Shell Advertising in the Early 1930s', 127.

adopted a dual aesthetic of the rural and the modern, which chimed with the preservationist's founding message that 'to-day, when Development and Change is everywhere contemplated, the creation of a *new* beauty is as important as the preservation of the *old*'.⁴²³ Kauffer's Shell poster of Stonehenge typified this double aspect. It is night and the stones are lit by an unknown light source, which blanches the monoliths and rids them of any picturesque weathering. Kauffer utilised the already regulated formation of Stonehenge to create a composition structured neatly around rectangles and circles, in a manner that was typical of his style. Kauffer's Stonehenge offered exactly that sense of order advocated by the CPRE. I argue that Nash also recognised this aesthetic at Stonehenge, which he described as 'a simple and mighty conception'.⁴²⁴ In a similar manner to Kauffer, Nash's photographs of Avebury demonstrated how the formal strength of Neolithic earthworks lent themselves easily to a modernist rhetoric. Avebury's circles, the line of the Avenue, the pyramid of Silbury Hill and the rectangular stones offered Nash an abundance of shapes that could be made geometric without radical moderation. The photograph *Avebury Stone* (1933) is vertically dissected into thirds by a standing stone, which reaches all the way to the top of the photograph and is as much an element of form as of content. A line of trees on the horizon divides the composition in half. This photograph, as a network of simple lines, suggests Nash's interest in the formal strength of the Neolithic site. Another photograph shows two stones, which stand one before the other. Both stones are wide and take up the majority of the composition, blocking the quaint scenery of fields, hedgerows and trees. The stones appear architecturally bold in this otherwise picturesque landscape and their incongruity gives the appearance that they have been collaged onto the scene. In both photographs Avebury accords with a modernist design aesthetic, yet maintains strong associations with Britain's heritage. This duality is emphasised a year later when Keiller starts to excavate and restore the site. Keiller's excavation locates Avebury deep within the Neolithic past, while his

⁴²³ Abercrombie, *The Preservation of Rural England, etc*, 44.

⁴²⁴ Nash, 'A Characteristic', 136.

restoration cleans up the site and emphasises its 'good' design. Keiller's team re-erected fallen stones, inserted concrete pylons to mark missing stones, cleared bushes and repaired fences. The archaeologist announces Avebury's long history while modernising it and complies with the CPRE's Janus-faced vision.

The new beauty that the CPRE promoted appears in Shell's book *Petroleum and Agriculture* (1938), which contains a series of articles showing the benefits of petroleum products on farming. Barnett Freedman's illustrations of quaint, pastoral Britain are positioned alongside photographs of modern, agricultural machinery. On the inside cover there is a photograph of a man on a tractor interlinked with an illustration of pre-industrial agricultural tools like a scythe, a rake and a spade. *Petroleum and Agriculture* demonstrates how the modern and the antiquated merge together seamlessly in a company like Shell. The text emphasises the cleanliness of oil as a fuel in comparison to coal, suggesting that it was the unobtrusive operation of oil that allowed Freedman's quaint pastoral illustrations to coalesce so easily with the photographs of Shell's modern technology.⁴²⁵ The oil company was so successful at promoting itself as both traditional and modern that, in a sense, the CPRE could not have hoped for better coverage for their vision of Britain. Nash comments on the pervasiveness of Shell's advertising campaigns: 'Mr Beddington [publicity manager for Shell], who so ably controls and directs these operations, would explain that all this is done for the better advertisement of Shell, but we have only to observe the thoroughness and distinction of his products to realise that - consciously or unconsciously - he is discharging an aesthetic responsibility to the public'.⁴²⁶ Shell promotes the preservation of the British countryside by presenting the beauty of pastoral landscapes untrammelled by the ugly effects of urbanisation. John Hewitt states that within Shell's campaign 'nature becomes associated with a rural world

⁴²⁵ 'The absence of dirt or dust caused by solid fuel and ashes permit the dairy boiler to be placed inside the dairy or washroom without in any way detracting from the requisite degree of cleanliness'. Anon, *Petroleum and Agriculture: A Series of Articles Showing the Part Played by Petroleum Products in General Farming*, 51.

⁴²⁶ Nash, 'The Artist and the Community', 69.

presented as complete, not worked upon; a world of eternal values as opposed to the artificial, shifting order of the city'.⁴²⁷ Nash's Shell poster, *Rye Marshes*, presents a rural marshland scene that is modernised by a spare aesthetic and strong architectural forms. The poster accords with Peters Corbett's claim that the horrors of the First World War made it difficult for British artists to explore modernity directly. After the war the modern world often appeared in paintings as an illicit presence, through the formal aesthetics of modernism rather than the direct representation of modernity. By 1918 the technological concerns of modernism, which had been explored rather than established in pre-War Britain, generally served traditional subject matters like portraiture and rural landscapes. Peters Corbett states that the 'War changed the understanding of modernity and consequently its representation: technology, urbanization, and the speed of change were compromised and the new art that tried to deal with these matters was compromised with them'.⁴²⁸ The formal properties of modernism were often put in the service of a profoundly romantic vision of nature.⁴²⁹ This modern, yet romantic, vision was precisely the aesthetic presented in Shell's posters and also in Nash's Avebury paintings *Landscape of the Megaliths* (1934) and *Equivalents for the Megaliths*.⁴³⁰ In Shell's advertising, modernist 'graphic style was frequently employed but they played down any references to modern qualities of speed and power and offered instead an untransformed countryside or rather a countryside which was transformed by aesthetic means not by the impact of commerce and technology, by modernism not by modernisation'.⁴³¹ *Rye Marshes* is a prime example of how an international modernist rhetoric formally underlies a supposedly rural scene. Nash tames the wild marshland with a spare aesthetic that makes land and sea appear uniform and rigid. The painting abstracts to such a degree that some objects become almost unidentifiable. The black and white triangle in the foreground is

⁴²⁷ Hewitt, 'The 'Nature' and 'Art' of Shell Advertising in the Early 1930s', 130.

⁴²⁸ Peters Corbett, 'The Third Factor': Modernity and the Absent City in the Work of Paul Nash, 1919-36', 457-8.

⁴²⁹ Ibid., 463.

⁴³⁰ Later in the chapter I demonstrate how Nash represented modernity in these Avebury paintings.

⁴³¹ Hewitt, 'The 'Nature' and 'Art' of Shell Advertising in the Early 1930s', 134.

possibly a sailboat, though the way it meets with the sea-ledge complicates this assumption. Both ledge and triangle cut into one another at the front of the picture so that neither takes the foreground. This impossible meeting destroys the illusion of real objects in three-dimensional space. Without the illusion of depth the sea-ledge stops receding into the distance and becomes flat and non-figurative, like the triangle next to it. As these geometric shapes interact in the bottom right-hand corner, the abstract regularity of the overall landscape is emphasised and nature is overwhelmed by architectural form. In *Rye Marshes* formal modernism and the British rural combine, making the site perfect CPRE country.

National Character

Nash's original vision of Avebury shared the CPRE's concern for both the ancient and modern. Causey claims that Nash did not approach the site merely as a subject for painting but considered it in 'broader landscape and cultural contexts'.⁴³² Nash asked himself, 'what is England and how do today and modernity relate to the past?'⁴³³ The question of heritage was a common preoccupation for many British artists and critics during the 1930s. Numerous publications on art and the national character were generated by the Royal Academy's 1934 exhibition, *British Art, c.1000-1860*. Causey notes that although Nash was abroad at the time of the exhibition, he was 'caught up in its wake and it is difficult to see Nash's writing for the Unit One book in 1934, with its passionate search for English identity, apart from the influence of that exhibition'.⁴³⁴ *British Art* was anticipated in Herbert Read's article 'English Art' (1933), which traced the essential characteristics of English art back to the Anglo-Saxon period.⁴³⁵ Three years after the exhibition Nash continued and expanded the search for national identity in his article 'A Characteristic' (1937), which was published in the American journal *Architectural*

⁴³² Causey, *Paul Nash: Landscape and the Life of Objects*, 104.

⁴³³ Ibid.

⁴³⁴ Causey, 'Introduction', 12.

⁴³⁵ Read, 'English Art', 244.

Record. In his attempt to define the essential qualities of British art to an overseas audience, Nash pinpointed the ‘architectural’ as an authentic factor of the country’s aesthetic and claimed that it had persisted throughout millennia.⁴³⁶ Nash began at Avebury and argued that its architecture inspired the formal strength of tenth-century Saxon fonts and crosses and, six hundred years later, reappeared in the regularity of Regency design.⁴³⁷ Where Read stopped at the Anglo-Saxons, Nash located the essential characteristics of British art as far back as the Neolithic period. Nash’s argument was problematic because it assumed an easy connection between Neolithic man and modern society through the Anglo-Saxons, without considering the cultural and genetic breaches between the former and the latter. Peters Corbett describes Nash’s simplistic sense of national heritage:

It remains unclear that his work is helpfully explained by attributing ‘Englishness’ to it as a characteristic when by that is meant something difficult to define and in practice nearly always, as here, narrow and subjective. Although he is often concerned with it, Nash does not offer us a coherent view of ‘Englishness’ nor a persuasive opinion on its constitution and character that is anything more than strategic.⁴³⁸

While Peters Corbett recognises that Nash was influenced by contemporary debates surrounding national identity, he suggests that the artist’s vision cannot be sufficiently understood through this discourse and remains idiosyncratic.⁴³⁹ Such an idiosyncrasy is expressed in ‘A Characteristic’, where Nash paralleled the Regency architecture of Carlton House Terrace with Neolithic Stonehenge. In a levelling tone, he claimed that a ‘hill, a tower, a teapot – the echo rings true throughout. Simple and large in aspect, the affinity becomes easy to trace, whether we compare Earls Barton with Stonehenge, or Carlton House Terrace or the Admiralty Stores at Portsmouth’.⁴⁴⁰ He closed his article with the

⁴³⁶ Nash applied the term ‘architectural’ to various examples of British art from various time periods and stated that within these works ‘plan and direction are essentials’. Nash, ‘A Characteristic’, 136.

⁴³⁷ Ibid.

⁴³⁸ Peters Corbett, ‘Paul Nash’, 735.

⁴³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁰ Nash, ‘A Characteristic’, 136.

suggestion that ‘English art has begun to grow into a healthy shape again. In twenty years we may be able to look back or even around with renewed confidence’.⁴⁴¹ This connected the Neolithic with the 1930s applied arts and gave Stonehenge and Avebury a contemporary relevance. The same thing occurred in the Avebury painting *Equivalents for the Megaliths*, which according to Nash avoided ‘the very powerful influence of the antiquarian suggestion’.⁴⁴² As Nash transformed stones into grids and cylinders he dissociated them from antiquity and accentuated their formal qualities. P. Morton Shand supported Nash’s claim that the artist did not look to Avebury for antiquarian information:

Druidism was the last ‘established’ religion in these islands. We know little of its rites except that they were celebrated among sacred groves and within stone circles erected by some much older civilisation. Though Wiltshire farmers have used the ruins of Old Sarum and Clarendon Palace as quarries ever since the site was abandoned, it is significant that they could not bring themselves to treat Avebury and Stonehenge in the same way until well into the eighteenth century – the Age of Reason. About six years ago some of the sarsen monoliths which then lay neglected in the fields around Avebury began to exercise an irresistible attraction on Paul Nash that altogether transcended their vague, prehistoric associations.⁴⁴³

Shand suggested that Nash’s engagement with Avebury was instinctive rather than intellectual. Nash did not look to the site to recover knowledge of the Neolithic period but, in the manner of prehistoric people, he approached it with a sense of venerate fascination. Appropriately, in ‘A Characteristic’ Nash described Avebury as ‘the holy stones of the Great Circle’.⁴⁴⁴

During the 1930s Nash was not alone in his passion for Avebury. The increased ownership of the motorcar, alongside the popularisation of archaeology, meant that

⁴⁴¹ Ibid., 137.

⁴⁴² Nash quoted in Bertram, *Paul Nash: The Portrait of an Artist*, 243.

⁴⁴³ Press Cutting from *Country Life* Magazine: ‘Object and Landscape’ by P. Morton Shand, 1939, TGA 769/9/5, Paul Nash Collection, Tate Archive, London.

⁴⁴⁴ Nash, ‘A Characteristic’, 134.

Neolithic sites like Avebury and Stonehenge became tourist attractions. This echoed and amplified the transport advancements that Stukeley witnessed in the eighteenth century, when coaches and carriages ‘improved with new developments in technology, especially in steel springs, and so did the road surfaces that made lighter and faster vehicles possible, and English coach builders outstripped the Continent. The Tour in search of the Picturesque, inevitably including antiquities, could now become comfortable, popular and widespread’.⁴⁴⁵ The eighteenth and twentieth centuries saw radical transport developments prompt greater public interest in countryside antiquities. During the intervening nineteenth century these historical sites were threatened with industrial development and simple neglect. As a result around three thousand monuments were secured under the Ancient Monuments Protection Act between 1882 and 1931. Much of Stonehenge and its surrounding landscape came under the care of the National Trust in 1927. During the 1930s campaigns to protect Avebury were launched and Keiller secured a great deal of the complex from development in 1934. Keiller’s excavations drew a substantial amount of attention to the site and the archaeological journal *Antiquity* noted: ‘As evidence of the increased public interest in Avebury it may be remarked that the attendance of visitors rose, following the excavations under review [1937-8], from 100-200 a week to an average of between 1000-1500 during the summer months. These figures have not only been maintained but considerably exceeded since 1937’.⁴⁴⁶ During this period Avebury and Stonehenge received a substantial amount of publicity in the press, which in turn cultivated certain images of the Neolithic sites in the minds of the British people. In 1937 *The Bath Weekly Chronicle and Herald* described Avebury as ‘the Wiltshire village which is famous world over, not only as an area of natural loveliness, but for enclosing antiquities unparalleled in these islands. It is a village no less interesting than Stonehenge. A scheme to make it safe forever has been drawn up’.⁴⁴⁷ In the 1930s it was common to describe, inaccurately, these Neolithic sites as villages and Massingham wrote

⁴⁴⁵ Piggott, *Ruins in a Landscape: Essays in Antiquarianism*, 124.

⁴⁴⁶ Keiller, ‘Avebury: Summary of Excavations, 1937 and 1938’, 229.

⁴⁴⁷ ‘Avebury’, *Bath Weekly Chronicle and Herald*, July 24, 1937.

that ‘the significance of the megalithic monolith of the Bronze Age, of the stone circles of Stonehenge, of Avebury, and of Arbor Lowe, becomes less obscure when we understand that the setting up of a stone was an unwritten law of the more primitive village community’.⁴⁴⁸ Village life, which in reality was fast disappearing, was an important aspect of British national identity in the 1930s. William George Constable, organiser of the *British Art* exhibition, claimed that the establishment of the Saxon system of village communities had ‘been of abiding significance’ to English culture.⁴⁴⁹ During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as people looked to the cities for work, village life suffered. Massingham nostalgically recalled that the village community seemed ‘one of the most, if not the most, memorable thing in the history and pre-history of England’.⁴⁵⁰ In the 1930s preservationists like Massingham promoted the idea that the village was the locus of national character. Therefore, presenting Avebury and Stonehenge as prehistoric villages established an additional incentive to protect these Neolithic sites from development. In the *British Art* catalogue, Constable explained how the Saxon system of village communities significantly shaped British creative activity in the tenth century. He described the ‘parish church and the country house – wherein are displayed a sense of the genius-loci, an adjustment to local needs and circumstances, and an individuality and refinement of craftsmanship which are peculiarly English’.⁴⁵¹ Constable helped promote the idea that artistic national character blossomed within community life. This notion had been expressed in Oliver Goldsmith’s poem *The Deserted Village* (1770), which lamented rural depopulation in the eighteenth century caused by enclosure:

The man of wealth and pride
Takes up a place that many poor supplied⁴⁵²

⁴⁴⁸ Massingham, ‘Our Inheritance from the Past’, 28.

⁴⁴⁹ Constable, ‘Introduction’, 12.

⁴⁵⁰ Massingham, ‘Our Inheritance from the Past’, 29.

⁴⁵¹ Constable, ‘Introduction’, 12.

⁴⁵² Goldsmith, *The Deserted Village*, 22.

For Goldsmith the threat to village life was also a threat to the poet, who could no longer depend upon on the village community for practical and artistic support. Longing for the past, he wrote:

I still had hopes, for pride attends us still,
Amidst the swains to show my book-learned skill,
Around my fire and evening group to draw,
And to tell of all I felt, and all I saw;⁴⁵³

Raymond Williams observes that in Goldsmith's poem 'the social forces which are dispossessing the village are seen as simultaneously dispossessing poetry'.⁴⁵⁴ *The Deserted Village* emphasised a link between artistic productivity and village communities. Similarly, Constable wrote that in the Middle Ages the architect, 'sculptor, painter, embroiderer, metal worker, might not be the same man, but they appear to have worked in one studio, and the designs for one art were frequently used by or adopted by the others'.⁴⁵⁵ In 1932, in a manner that anticipated Constable, Nash claimed that when 'the day comes for a more practical, sympathetic alliance between architect, painter, sculptor and decorator, we may see the acceleration of an important movement'.⁴⁵⁶ In an attempt to strengthen the artistic community in Britain, including those working within the applied arts, Nash helped form the art group Unit One in 1933.⁴⁵⁷

Unit One

The original members of Unit One were architects Wells Coates and Colin Lucas, sculptors Barbara Hepworth and Henry Moore, and painters John Armstrong, John Bigge, Edward Burra, Frances Hodgkins (who would be replaced by Tristram

⁴⁵³ Ibid., 10.

⁴⁵⁴ Williams, *The Country and the City*, 77.

⁴⁵⁵ Constable, 'Introduction', 15.

⁴⁵⁶ Nash, 'The Artist in the House', 72.

⁴⁵⁷ Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis, it must be noted that Eric Gill established an artistic community on Ditchling Common in 1921 that ran until 1989. For a detailed discussion see Ruth and Joe Cribb's *Eric Gill and Ditchling: The Workshop Tradition* (2007).

Hillier), Paul Nash, Ben Nicholson and Edward Wadsworth.⁴⁵⁸ The Unit was made up of a disparate selection of individuals and, failing to cohere, disbanded in less than two years. Michel Remy notes: 'Its theoretical tenets were so vague and the stylistic development of each artist so rapid, that a split soon took place between what one might call the 'figurationists' and the 'pure-abstractionists'".⁴⁵⁹ In October 1935 Hepworth, Moore and Nicholson exhibited with The Seven and Five Society, which was by then a predominantly abstract group. In contrast, Burra, Hillier and Nash exhibited at the *International Surrealist Exhibition* in 1936. In the foreword to *Unit One*, Herbert Read admitted:

These artists have not agreed that any one method of painting or carving or building is the right method; they have not even agreed that their art should express a common sentiment or even a conscious direction [...]. The most we can say is that, in the words used by Paul Nash ... 'Unit One may be said to stand for the expression of a truly contemporary spirit, for that thing which is recognised as peculiarly of to-day in painting, sculpture and architecture'.⁴⁶⁰

Unit One was made up of a conglomerate of outsiders who went beyond the eighteenth-century traditions of landscape painting that still dominated the British art scene in the early 1930s.⁴⁶¹ In 1932 Geoffrey Holme had asked: 'Is there a British "School", in the sense of a closely knit group of painters animated by the same ideas and methods'?⁴⁶² Answering his own question, he bemoaned that there was not and compared the state of British art to the ruination of the countryside, which was 'unorganised, undisciplined, straggling like the wayward hedgerows that are (or were) of the British landscape'.⁴⁶³ Holme suggested that the modern British artist, like the modern property developer, disregarded the importance of village communities and thereby posed a threat to national

⁴⁵⁸ Nash, 'Unit One', 106.

⁴⁵⁹ Remy, *Surrealism in Britain*, 37.

⁴⁶⁰ Read, 'Foreword', 12.

⁴⁶¹ Nash, 'Unit One: A New Group of Artists', 98.

⁴⁶² Holme, 'The Younger School of Painting', 3.

⁴⁶³ Ibid.

identity. Holme warned that the lack of unity in British painting had 'led to it being duly depreciated in other countries'.⁴⁶⁴ He stated: 'With national thought or tendencies the British artist has singularly little contact, and his leaning for foreign countries has helped to sever him still further from national life'.⁴⁶⁵ During the 1930s Holme's magazine, *The Studio*, asked its readers to turn away from international modernism and concentrate on a more domestic aesthetic. It lamented the lack of national identity among contemporary British artists and asserted that a 'more vigorous participation of national life would help to overcome this defect'.⁴⁶⁶ Earlier that year Holme claimed that 'Britain is looking for British pictures, of British people, of British landscape'.⁴⁶⁷ In general, the early 1930s was an unfavourable time for contemporary art in Britain. Causey notes that during this period no books examining the nationality of art contributed anything of interest to the contemporary debate except for R. H. Wilenski's *English Painting* (1933).⁴⁶⁸ Although Wilenski focused on eighteenth-century art, he interwove modernists like Wyndham Lewis, Edward Burra and Nash into the annals of English art history. Wilenski explained how the eighteenth-century artist Francis Towne was weary 'of the stock ingredients of the picturesque landscape tradition. Towne looked intensively at specific structure and sought thus to give new life to the picturesque tradition [...]. Some of his drawings are expressed in a language that is as deliberately symbolic and geometrical as the *Still Life* by Paul Nash'.⁴⁶⁹ Wilenski suggested that what made Towne an original artist also made him isolated and unpopular.⁴⁷⁰ In this sense, little seemed to have changed for English artists in the last two hundred years. Wilenski implied that England was able to produce innovative art, but its artists failed to form a movement that was strong enough to gain international, or even national, recognition. In the 1920s and early 1930s most British

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid., 13.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid., 4.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid., 11.

⁴⁶⁷ Holme, 'What is Wrong with Modern Painting?', 64.

⁴⁶⁸ Causey, 'English Art and 'The National Character'', 1933-34', 294.

⁴⁶⁹ Wilenski, *English Painting*, 98.

⁴⁷⁰ Wilenski compared Towne to the eighteenth-century painter Giles Hussey, who was completely disregarded in his day due to his work belonging 'more to the twentieth century than his own'. Ibid.

modernists were restricted to recognition within their own country, which even there was limited. Charles Harrison notes that during this period it was extremely rare for British artists to exhibit in Paris, while French artists were given a great deal of exhibition space in London.⁴⁷¹ In 1931 under forty-five percent of the London exhibitions listed in *The Burlington Magazine* were dedicated to contemporary British artwork and only twelve percent of these exhibitions were associated with British modernism. Unit One emerged from a rare modernist exhibition called *Recent Developments in British Painting* (1931), held at Tooth's Art Gallery in London. Nash provided Ralph Keene, then assistant manager of Tooth's, with the exhibition's title and a list of thirteen contemporary British artists to be exhibited, six of whom would become members of Unit One.⁴⁷² *Recent Developments in British Painting* demonstrated that contemporary British modernists could exhibit together and this may have inspired Nash's idea for an art group.

Unit One had its first show in London in 1934, after which it toured large provincial towns between May 1934 and April 1935. Like Shell's advertising campaign, Unit One transported a modernist rhetoric across the breadth of Britain during the 1930s. Unit One was seen in Liverpool, Manchester, Stoke-on-Trent, Derby, Swansea and Belfast, with each exhibition sponsored by the local municipal authorities. The regional press did not embrace the modernist visions of Unit One as it had Shell's advertising campaign. *The Derby Evening Telegraph* remarked:

If anybody gets anything they value out of this sort of thing it can only be a very small exclusive clique who have the time and inclination to find their way in this maze of abstractions: it is certainly not for the ordinary work-a-day person who finds life has got him by the collar and urges him along other paths.⁴⁷³

⁴⁷¹ Harrison, *English Art and Modernism 1900-1939*, 231.

⁴⁷² John Armstrong, John Bigge, Edward Burra, Paul Nash, Ben Nicholson and Edward Wadsworth.

⁴⁷³ 'Pictures That Have a Shattering Effect: Exhibition of Modern Art at Derby', *Derby Evening Telegraph*, November 30, 1934.

Unit One presented a far more challenging abstract aesthetic than Shell's posters, which were fundamentally founded in rural conventions. Wadsworth's *Dux and Comes: Exhalation* (1933, fig. 34) depicts two near identical, organic-looking abstract forms and Bigge's *Composition* (1933) presents a blue field, with an association of non-figurative shapes gravitating towards the centre. In his written entry for *Unit One*, Bigge claims that modern painting should avoid 'Romanticism, Prettyness, charm, decorativeness, and preciousity' and look for 'Precision, clarity and simplicity'.⁴⁷⁴ Accordingly, in a letter to *The Times* in June 1933, a month before visiting Avebury, Nash states that the prevailing vision of Unit One was: 'Design for instance – considered as a structural pursuit; imagination, explored apart from literature or metaphysics'.⁴⁷⁵ Similarly, structural purpose is essential to Coates' architecture. In 1932 he designs the news studios at Broadcasting House and a year later his designs for Lawn Road flats at Hampstead are being built. Coates promotes a minimalist way of living, making his flats suitable for people with few belongings. Accordingly, Lawn Road's early tenants include refugee avant-garde artists Walter Gropius, László Moholy-Nagy, and Marcel Breuer. Their rooms lack the traditional decoration of a dado rail, cornice and ceiling rose. These spaces are to be furnished with pieces of proto-ergonomic furniture and little else. In *Unit One* Coates echoes the clean aesthetic promoted by the CPRE when he writes:

As architects of the ultimate human and material scenes of the new order, we are not so much concerned with the formal problems of 'style' as with an *architectural* solution of the social and economic problems of today. Evidence of the necessity of a new order reveals itself every other day, in some new social or economic 'crisis.' As creative architects we are concerned with a Future which must be *planned*, rather than a past which must be *patched up*, at all costs.⁴⁷⁶

A modernist rhetoric of regulation and order are the most prevalent aspects of Coates' architecture and this aesthetic stretches across the breadth of Unit One, with the solitary

⁴⁷⁴ Bigge, 'John Bigge', 50.

⁴⁷⁵ Nash, 'Unit One: A New Group of Artists', 98-9.

⁴⁷⁶ Coates, 'Wells Coates', 108.

exception of Burra. David Mellor states that Unit One's 'attempt to seize an image of the future from a strongpoint, to break with a conserving and decaying order, was symptomatic of certain other areas in British culture in that moment of 1932-5'.⁴⁷⁷ While I agree with this claim, unlike Mellor I do not link Unit One to the Mosleyian universe of a 'new Britain, planified, regulated and unitary'.⁴⁷⁸ Instead I associate the group with the CPRE, which similarly detested the decadence of excess but intended to implement regulation and order without recourse to a radical national insularity.⁴⁷⁹ My argument is supported by two of the paintings Nash submitted for *Unit One: Studio* (1929, fig. 35) and *Kinetic Feature* (1931), which both take their influence from Picasso. *Studio* presents an artist's workspace, where four different sized canvases stand upright, one before the other. Causey points out that this composition clearly makes a human figure and evokes Picasso's *Seated Woman* (1915-6).⁴⁸⁰ Picasso confuses the subject with the medium upon which she is represented and transforms her into a rectangular, blank canvas. *Studio* demonstrates the intellectual influence of the continental modernists on Nash and, more generally, Unit One. Nash is keen to establish a link between the group and the continent in a letter to Ruth Clark from 1933:

Artists are in a bad way in Paris. The modern art ramp of five years ago has ruined the market for all modern art. Miró had a huge show at Bernheim-Jeune and sold nothing. Picasso is not selling. Léger is teaching. Only the painterly impressionists like Segonzac are making anything. Everyone says London is the place! Il ya a un petit mouvement en Angleterre n'est ce pas? A polite inquisitiveness is expressed. Unit One has been heard of even in Paris!⁴⁸¹

Nash wants Unit One to compete with, but not be derivative of, continental modernism.

In accordance with Holme's plea that British art must cultivate its own identity, Nash

⁴⁷⁷ Mellor, 'British Art in the 1930s: Some Economic, Political and Cultural Structures', 189.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁹ Mosley pledged to reduce foreign imports, claiming that foreign goods displaced British agricultural goods and damaged domestic farming. Mosley, *The Greater Britain*, 127.

⁴⁸⁰ Causey, *Paul Nash*, 183.

⁴⁸¹ File of Letters and One Photograph from Paul Nash to Ruth Clark, 1933-1946, TGA 7411, Paul Nash Collection, Tate Archive, London.

stresses that the 'kind of art practiced by the individuals of Unit One is no doubt traceable to origins; its counterpart is to be found in many other countries to-day; that, however is no reason for under-estimating its value'.⁴⁸² Despite this intention, *Kinetic Feature* is possibly the most derivative homage to Picasso that Nash produces.⁴⁸³ Causey describes it as 'an uneasy picture' and explains that while the composition is indebted to Picasso's *Guitar* (1916) the painting cannot match the focus of its influence.⁴⁸⁴ *Kinetic Feature* suggests that while Nash is interested in formal composition he fails to fully commit to a modernist sensibility.

Abstraction and Surrealism

Nash's paintings for *Unit One* lacked the local aesthetic that critics like Holme were craving. However, Nash's personal statement for the catalogue, written at least two years after the paintings were composed, focuses on the British landscape as a key inspiration for both traditional and modern artists. Nash writes:

There seems to exist, behind the frank expressions of portrait and scene, an imprisoned spirit: yet this spirit is the source, the motive power which animates this art. These pictures are the vehicles of this spirit but, somehow, they are inadequate, being only echoes and reflections of familiar images (in portrait and scene). If I were asked to describe this spirit I would say it is of the land; *genius loci* is indeed almost its conception.⁴⁸⁵

Nash's romantic statement starkly contrasts the five near-abstract paintings he presents in the exhibition catalogue, none of which have an obvious sense of *genius loci* (the spirit of the landscape).⁴⁸⁶ The disparity between the paintings and the statement prompts one to ask what happened between 1932 and 1934 to transform Nash's perception of Unit One

⁴⁸² Nash, 'Unit One: A New Group of Artists,' 98.

⁴⁸³ It must be noted that an illustration in 'The Garden of Cyrus' called *The Quincunx Mystically Considered* also bears a striking resemblance to Picasso's pen and ink drawing *Project for a Monument, Dinard* (1928).

⁴⁸⁴ Causey, *Paul Nash*, 238.

⁴⁸⁵ Nash, 'Paul Nash', 80.

⁴⁸⁶ *Interior* (1928), *Northern Adventure* (1929), *Kinetic Feature* (1931), *Aerial Composition* (1933), *Studio* (1929).

from an offshoot of continental modernism to a group rooted in the local landscape? Causey suggests that Nash was ‘influenced by the Nazis’ coming to power in 1933 and their appropriation of culture for political purposes, as a means of reshaping German identity and, as a consequence, foregrounding national identity as an issue in other European countries’.⁴⁸⁷ Causey considers that Nash was ‘also stimulated by the huge exhibition of British art mounted by the Royal Academy in the early months of 1934 and the extensive debates over culture and identity to which it gave rise’.⁴⁸⁸ I argue that in addition to these two events, Nash was influenced by his first visit to Avebury in 1933. Mellor states that Nash visited the

Avebury megalithic remains in Wiltshire, and, fascinated, succumbed to the mystique of the romantic pre-historic landscape. Even as Unit 1 was being organized Nash was, in fact, in recoil ... from the ordered, constructed, purist Utopia [...]. Nash suspected that the central modernist style, post-Cubist, orderly, architectural, was in disrepair, and might be superseded by a more fluid pictorial space – like that found in the Surrealist organization of a picture – one that, moreover, could allow the representation of myths.⁴⁸⁹

I argue that Stukeley influenced Nash’s developing interest in Avebury and myth. However, these interests must have been forming before Nash had even read *Abury*. Clark recalled his first perception of the stones as personalities in 1933:

Suddenly we saw on the left great Stones standing up in the field. Paul was excited and fascinated. We spent long hours on the great grass banks entranced at the sight of the stones below in the large green enclosure – great ‘personalities’ erect, or lying prone or built into the structure by indifferent generations of dwellers in Avebury. His response was to the drama of the Stones themselves in this quiet setting. His sensitiveness to the magic and the sinister beauty of their forms, their aloofness, their majesty, and the shadows they cast on the green, the loveliness of their harsh surfaces and the tenderness of their colouring. He seemed to have found renewed vitality in this countryside.⁴⁹⁰

⁴⁸⁷ Causey, *Paul Nash: Landscape and the Life of Objects*, 98.

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 98-9.

⁴⁸⁹ Mellor, ‘British Art in the 1930s: Some Economic, Political and Cultural Structures’, 190.

⁴⁹⁰ Clark quoted in Bertram, *Paul Nash: The Portrait of an Artist*, 216.

I argue that Avebury was significant for Nash because he felt it encapsulated both formal abstraction and British surrealism. He believed that the latter had been alive in Britain, in the form of myth making, for thousands of years before it came to London for the *International Surrealist Exhibition* in 1936. Nash emphasised its longevity: 'But the artists [contemporary surrealists] at the New Burlington Galleries represent a far wider cast than would include only members of the movement ... it enables, also, the British public to explore beyond these into a domain that has existed many thousands of years previous to 1922, the surrealist world'.⁴⁹¹ Nash's idea of surrealism had a strong Neo-Romantic aspect, which presented William Wordsworth as a member of the movement because of the poet's acute fear of inanimate objects. He quoted Hugh Sykes Davies' claim that Wordsworth 'built up a mythology which has been of the very greatest importance in English culture. In its general outline it conforms to the fundamental mythology of the human race; it is the systematic animation of the inanimate which attributes life and feeling onto non-human nature'.⁴⁹² Nash animated the inanimate in his photograph *Avebury Sentinel* (1933, fig. 36), which, through its title, transforms a towering megalith into a soldier. From this perspective the stone looks like a face and the hole near its top becomes an eye. Avebury allowed Nash to indulge in a romantic form of surrealism, while the site's architectural strength enabled him to maintain a vestige of his formal concerns.

I argue that the site symbolised Nash's intention for Unit One to link 'the expression of structural purpose' with 'the pursuit of the soul'.⁴⁹³ In his written entry for *Unit One* Nash connected these two intentions through the modernist Wadsworth, a leading figure in non-figurative art in Britain. Nash claimed that one could identify Wadsworth's work amongst any French or Italian non-figurative painter. Just as the reds

⁴⁹¹ Nash, 'Surrealism in Interior Decoration', 11.

⁴⁹² Nash quoting Sykes Davies, 'The Life of the Inanimate Object', 138.

⁴⁹³ Nash, 'Unit One', 105.

and greens used by Matisse betrayed his Mediterranean situation, the pinks and greys used by Wadsworth betrayed his Anglo-Northern situation. In Wadsworth's *Composition on Pink Background* (1933, fig. 37) grey dirt penetrates the painting. The pinks and reds are not the rich colours of the Mediterranean but the colours of tarnished metal. Through curling grey lines and faded hues, Wadsworth made his painting speak of industrial Britain.⁴⁹⁴ Nash celebrated the way *Composition on Pink Background* presented 'the mind of a particular man, an Englishman, a northerner, actually a Yorkshireman'.⁴⁹⁵ According to Nash, Wadsworth's paintings were distinguished by an expression of that imprisoned spirit, which 'is of the land; *genius loci* is indeed almost its conception'.⁴⁹⁶ Nash claimed that *genius loci* could be traced throughout the history of British art. He characterised it as having a 'pronounced linear method in design, no doubt traceable to sources in Celtic ornament [...]'. A peculiar bright delicacy in choice of colours – somewhat cold but radiant and sharp in key'.⁴⁹⁷ This positioned Wadsworth within a British tradition, despite the fact that his own personal statement for *Unit One* shared none of Nash's nationalistic sentiment. In contrast, Wadsworth's text consisted of a dry list of aphorisms on modern art and finished by undermining the country's current preoccupation with national character: 'But one does not speak of 'English' mathematics or 'English' tennis'.⁴⁹⁸ It is interesting to note that when writing about Wadsworth two years earlier, before visiting Avebury, Nash described him as an artist who 'derives inspiration from natural forms but resolves an abstract equivalent'.⁴⁹⁹ By 1934 Nash no longer seemed to appreciate Wadsworth's abstraction, but instead praised his ability to capture the spirit of the British landscape. Following Causey, I argue that the articles on national character surrounding

⁴⁹⁴ Wadsworth's painting suggests a dirty, industrial Britain, which is something that Shell's advertising omitted. Perhaps this indicates why Shell was popular and Unit One was not?

⁴⁹⁵ Nash, 'Paul Nash', 79.

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁸ Wadsworth, 'Edward Wadsworth', 99.

⁴⁹⁹ Nash, 'Abstract Art', 80.

British Art influenced this change.⁵⁰⁰ Nash's written entry for *Unit One* echoed Read's essay 'English Art', which stated that a 'love of the landscape was always present in our national character'.⁵⁰¹ Read claimed that William Blake was a prime example of this passion and he linked his work to ninth-century art: 'This linear quality, 'the bounding line and its infinite inflections and movements' as Blake was to express it, is clearly discernable in all types of Anglo-Saxon art – in the Alfred Jewel no less than the Bayeux Tapestry'.⁵⁰² Read subsequently drew parallels between ninth-century art and nineteenth-century Romantic landscape painting, via Blake, explaining that the national temper continued in the modern consciousness of Turner.⁵⁰³ In a similar manner to Read, Nash's statement for *Unit One* related modern consciousness back to Neolithic man at Avebury. Nash ended his statement with this reflection:

Last summer, I walked in a field near Avebury where two rough monoliths stand up, sixteen feet high, miraculously patterned with blocks of orange lichen, remnants of the avenue of stones which lead to the Great Circle. A mile away, a green pyramid casts a gigantic shadow. In the hedge, at hand, the white trumpet of a convolvulus turns from its spiral stem, following the sun. In my art I would solve such an equation.⁵⁰⁴

The monoliths, stone circle and Silbury Hill injected a human quality to the rectangle, circle and pyramid that the majority of *Unit One* celebrated. Nash's personal statement communicated Neo-Romantic sentiment as it married nostalgic archetypes with resources from the European avant-garde, retooling 'a cosmopolitan modernist lexicon so as to validate a proudly indigenous visual repertoire'.⁵⁰⁵ Nash expressed Neo-Romantic sentiment in the relationship between the tree stump and tennis ball in *Event on the Downs* (1934, fig. 38). The former, mottled and gnarled with age, represents a picturesque romanticism, while the tennis ball, newly white and spherical, represents the modernist

⁵⁰⁰ Causey, 'Introduction', 12.

⁵⁰¹ Read, 'English Art', 270.

⁵⁰² *Ibid.*, 244.

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*, 260.

⁵⁰⁴ Nash, 'Paul Nash', 81.

⁵⁰⁵ Radford, 'The Enchantment of Place: Mary Butts, Wessex, and Interwar Neo-Romanticism', 158.

concern for formal perfection. The shadow of the tree stump almost touches the tennis ball and suggests a connection, while the cloud in the sky hovers above both objects to reinforce this link. Accordingly, the shape of the cloud reflects the tree stump, while its colour mirrors the white of the tennis ball. The cloud signifies the transformation of the perfectly spherical tennis ball into the gnarled tree stump. The tennis ball, as a symbol of fitness, grace and control, seemed so at home in Nash's design for Lord Benbow's apartment in 1930. Four years later it appeared endangered as the irregular, timeworn landscape threatened to subsume it. One imagines that the tennis ball came flying in from Betjeman's poem *A Subaltern's Love Song* (1941) and was consequently discarded as he and Miss Joan Hunter Dunn swung past the summerhouse, smelt the conifers and admired the moss-dappled path.⁵⁰⁶ Nash's change, from an architectural to a more romantic approach to landscape, is reinforced by a comment he made regarding Keiller's restoration of Avebury. As stated, Keiller tidied the Neolithic site and accentuated its grand design. According to Aubrey Burl, the archaeologist was 'disgusted with the indescribable squalor of the side nearer the village, a metre-high heap of tins and bottles by two stones, rusting pig wire in the grass, the ditch foul with rubbish, the bank hidden in a jungle of undergrowth and trees'.⁵⁰⁷ It is easy to assume that Nash, who promoted clean design in the early 1930s, would have supported Keiller's tidying up of Avebury. While Nash may have approved of clearing away the rubbish, he clearly wanted to maintain the appearance of natural decay that surrounded the site in 1933. In an unpublished manuscript dated ca.1944 he stated:

The great stones [in 1933] were in their wild state, so to speak. Some were half covered by grass, others stood up in cornfields or were entangled and overgrown in the copses, some were buried under the turf. But they were wonderful and disquieting, and as I saw them then, I shall always remember them. Very soon afterward the big work of reinstating the Circles and Avenues began, so that to a great extent that primal magic of the stones' appearance was lost.⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰⁶ Betjeman, 'A Subaltern's Love Song', 103.

⁵⁰⁷ Burl, *Prehistoric Avebury*, 71.

⁵⁰⁸ Nash, 'Stones', 155.

Keiller, with support from the CPRE, ‘restored’ Avebury. While Nash may have encouraged the preservationist restoration in 1932, he was opposed to it by the late 1930s. Keiller’s restoration reduced the picturesque appearance of Avebury and the romantic associations that this appearance inspired. Additionally, his excavations made Avebury’s past fact-based and destroyed the Neo-Romantic preference for myth making. In contrast to Keiller, Stukeley’s *Abury* promoted myth, claiming that there ‘are vast treasures of ancient knowledge in mythology, especially of both history sacred and civil’.⁵⁰⁹

Three Avebury Paintings

I examine Nash’s engagement with Stukeley through the former’s annotations of *Abury*. These annotations illustrate a change in both Nash’s vision of the site and his relationship to British modernism. I argue that after reading Stukeley, Nash developed an even more romantically surreal engagement with Avebury. I trace Stukeley’s incremental influence on Nash through a close analysis of three major Avebury paintings undertaken between 1934 and 1937. The first is *Landscape of the Megaliths* (1934), which presents two stones standing before two circles of trees on distant hills.⁵¹⁰ This semi-abstract oil is starkly unsentimental and the megaliths are barely recognisable as megaliths. Nash breaks up the stones into sections of contrasting colours. ‘The megaliths’ modern aesthetic reconfigures prehistory and brings the past into the present. This reconfiguration accords with Myfanwy Evans’ comment that Nash had ‘no interest in the past as *past*, but the accumulated intenseness of the past as *present* is his special concern and joy’.⁵¹¹ The flat Avebury stones in *Landscape of the Megaliths* (1934) do not belong to prehistory. At first glance they look like two-dimensional patches of colour. However, if one studies the

⁵⁰⁹ Stukeley, *Abury: A Temple of the British Druids*, 63.

⁵¹⁰ I repeatedly give the dates for *Landscape of the Megaliths* (1934) and *Landscape of the Megaliths* (1937) in order to distinguish between the two paintings.

⁵¹¹ Evans, ‘Paul Nash’, 12.

composition a little longer they start to gather perspective. The mustard yellow in the front stone harmonises with the olive green grass beside it and the dark ochre hills behind. The yellow area of colour transforms from stone into hill as it undulates into the distance. Nash darkens the front stone's edges so that its yellow body merges quite seamlessly into the ochre hills. This perspective is emphasised further by the way the horizon-line on the left meets with the curvature of the front stone and then travels through the stone into the horizon-line on the right. From this perspective, the circular shape at the centre of the painting looks like a sun intersecting the horizon. *Landscape of the Megaliths* (1934) can be seen as a semi-abstract rendering of the equation Nash described at the end of *Unit One*: 'In the hedge, at hand, the white trumpet of a convolvulus turns from its spiral stem, following the sun'.⁵¹² The disc is the sun, while the black line that traces the left side of the front stone is the convolvulus. Through the disc and black line, *Landscape of the Megaliths* (1934) relates directly to the watercolour of the same title that Nash made in 1937 (fig. 39). The later, far more naturalistic painting, presents the convolvulus and the sun figuratively rather than abstractly. The shared title between the two paintings suggests that the earlier landscape is the first-draft of the latter. I suggest that the equation Nash discussed in his personal statement for *Unit One* had not been solved in the compartmentalised, semi-abstract oil of 1934. Nash makes limited use of the canvas in *Landscape of the Megaliths* (1934), which Causey describes as 'not so much abstract but empty'.⁵¹³ The areas of flat colour surrounding the stones may, in part, have been due to Nash's limited knowledge of the Avebury complex in the early part of 1934.⁵¹⁴ A few months after finishing the painting he received *Abury*, which I argue generated a far more complete picture of the Neolithic complex in his mind. Nash's newfound knowledge of the site is displayed in *Landscape of the Megaliths* (1937) and the slightly earlier *Equivalents for the Megaliths*. After receiving the book, Nash wrote to Neilson

⁵¹² Nash, 'Paul Nash', 81.

⁵¹³ Causey, *Paul Nash*, 257.

⁵¹⁴ Causey notes the inclusion of *Landscape of the Megaliths* (1934) in the *Unit One* exhibition held at Mayor's Gallery in April 1934. Therefore it must have been completed in the February or March of 1934, before Nash had received Stukeley's *Abury: A Temple of the British Druids*.

thanking her for the gift: 'I can never thank you enough for Stukeley. I am much in your debt but I shan't let it worry me, only I want you to know how apt you've been'.⁵¹⁵

Nash's comment, that Neilson had been apt in giving him *Abury*, suggests that he had been struggling to depict the site in the 1934 painting. In the autumn of that year Nash wrote again to Neilson: 'Your Avebury book is now coming into its own. I do bless you for it'.⁵¹⁶ This comment indicates that Stukeley had an influence over Nash's forthcoming Avebury paintings, which presented the site as a complex rather than as a few isolated stones. Before receiving Stukeley's book it is likely that Nash's understanding of Avebury was limited because most of the six hundred standing stones that originally formed the complex had either fallen or had disappeared from the site completely when he visited in 1933. In contrast, Stukeley's comprehensive guide presents Avebury as having been one of the largest prehistoric complexes in Europe. There are six main sites within the complex. The oldest is Windmill Hill, a ceremonial site of burial and animal killings dating back to ca.3700BC. The newest part of the complex is the Avebury circle, which was constructed between 2600-2100BC and is the largest in Britain. None of the six sites appear in *Landscape of the Megaliths* (1934), whereas the Avenue and Silbury Hill are included in *Landscape of the Megaliths* (1937). The 1934 painting presents two stones and the Wittenham Clumps. The Clumps encapsulate the stones within an ancient landscape, but their inclusion is odd because they are found in Oxfordshire and have nothing to do with Avebury. I argue that the Clumps compensated for Nash's lack of knowledge regarding the prehistoric sites surrounding the Avebury stones in early 1934. I argue that between 1934 and 1937 Nash learnt a great deal about Avebury through Stukeley's book. As the aesthetic differences between the two paintings show, Nash also changed as an

⁵¹⁵ Letters from Paul Nash, 1934, Private Archive of Jeremy Greenwood and Alan Swerdlow, Claire Neilson Collection, Woodbridge.

⁵¹⁶ Letters from Paul Nash, 1934, Private Archive of Jeremy Greenwood and Alan Swerdlow, Claire Neilson Collection, Woodbridge.

artist during this period as he moved away from what he called ‘abstraction’ towards ‘pure interpretation’.⁵¹⁷

During the mid 1930s Nash struggled with the abstraction he had advocated earlier in the decade.⁵¹⁸ This struggle is notable in *Equivalents for the Megaliths*. When describing this semi-abstract painting, Nash stated that in designing the picture he ‘wished to avoid the very powerful influence of the antiquarian suggestion, and [wanted] to insist only upon the dramatic qualities of a composition of shapes equivalent to the prone or upright stones simply as upright or prone, or leaning masses, grouped together in a scene of open fields and hills’.⁵¹⁹ Nash rendered the Avebury stones as a collection of geometric squares and cylinders. The painting shows no sign of the ochre lichen or bruises of weathering that Nash described when writing about the site in the 1940s.⁵²⁰ These architectural objects are set incongruously amongst the rolling hills of rural England, as if placed in the landscape by alien invasion.⁵²¹ There is a marked difference between the perfection of the stones and what seems to be Oldbury Castle hill fort standing slightly askew on the distant hills. Similarly, the bold red lines of the grid on the back stone are in stark contrast with the delicate, irregular brushstrokes of the furrows in the field. Nash presented an overlap between Neolithic people and the modern artist as he modified the shape of the stones into grids and cylinders. Harris states that ‘Nash’s painting, which is at once mysterious and precise, broodingly ancient and clear-sightedly contemporary, makes use of abstraction to revitalise those strange shapes in the landscape’.⁵²² This ‘abstraction’ seemingly achieved Nash’s aim for the painting; to avoid the ‘antiquarian suggestion’.⁵²³ However, Stukeley’s observations of Avebury did feed into

⁵¹⁷ Nash quoted in Bertram, *Paul Nash: The Portrait of an Artist*, 231.

⁵¹⁸ Nash, ‘Abstract Art’ (1932).

⁵¹⁹ Letters from Paul Nash to Lance Sieveking, n.d., TAM 38.8, Paul Nash Collection, Tate Archive, London.

⁵²⁰ Nash, ‘Stones’, 155.

⁵²¹ Montagu, ‘Modern Artist, Ancient Landscape’, 12.

⁵²² Harris, *Romantic Moderns*, 22.

⁵²³ Letters from Paul Nash to Lance Sieveking, n.d., TAM 38.8, Paul Nash Collection, Tate Archive, London.

Equivalents for the Megaliths through Nash's inclusion of Oldbury Castle hill fort in the distance. In reality it is impossible to see the stones and hill fort together because the latter stands some four miles away from the circle and Avenue and is not part of the Avebury complex. Nash could have included one of the numerous prehistoric monuments within the complex, like Windmill Hill, Overton Hill or the West Kennet Long Barrow. Any of these sites would have given a strong demonstration of the prehistoric landscape of Avebury, for they are all within a two-mile distance from the circle and Avenue. It is likely that Nash decided to include Oldbury Castle because of *Abury*, which incorporated numerous drawings of the hill fort from within the complex. In *Rundway Hill 18th July 1723* (fig. 40) Stukeley drew Oldbury Castle as a series of simple, circular steps on the top of a hill and it appears almost identical in Nash's painting *Equivalents for the Megaliths*.

The antiquarian influence is even more apparent in *Landscape of the Megaliths* (1937), which took aspects from both Stukeley and Browne. The viewer's eye traces the Avenue of stones into the depth of the picture and a cloud blows in from the right side of the composition. The sun, which is setting, is about to touch the standing stone at the front of the painting. The snake follows the sun and therefore also appears to move towards the stone. These elements, which were condensed in 1934, are given space in 1937. The semi-abstraction that Nash experimented with in 1934 and 1935 has dissipated. Architectural structure remains in natural forms, such as the furrows of the cornfield and the shape of the stones. Appropriately, Nash uses watercolour, rather than oil, for his most traditional depiction of Avebury. His growing romanticism with the site is demonstrated by the transformation of the 1934 line and disc into a snake and a sun. Although the snake was an already established symbol in Nash's painting, Causey suggests that its appearance in *Landscape of the Megaliths* (1937) was partly the result of

reading *Abury*, which described the site as a serpent temple.⁵²⁴ By transforming the line into a serpent and the disc into a sun, Nash incorporated antiquarian imagery into his painting. The image of the sun, serpent and convolvulus first came together in *Skeleton, Phoenix and Snake*, which appeared in Nash's illustrations for Browne's *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus* in 1932. The illustration shows a phoenix with its wings spread, behind which a coiled snake rises up towards the sun. The image relates to this section of Browne's text: 'But the great *Convolvulus* or white flower'd *Bindweed* observes both motions of the Sunne, while the flower twists Aequinoctially from the left hand to the right, according to the daily revolution; the stalk twineth elliptically from the right hand to the left, according to the annual conversion'.⁵²⁵ Causey elaborates on Browne's influence over Nash's general perception of Avebury:

Under scrutiny, other markings emerge: in *Landscape of the Megaliths* [1934] there are strange lines, one linking the larger stone to a cloud. The spheres may relate to the mystical symbol for the godhead in *The Garden of Cyrus*, and Browne's books seem very much in Nash's mind. For example, the form of *Druid Landscape* recalls the stone effigy at the bottom of the steps in *Ghosts* (1932) from *Urne Buriall*.⁵²⁶

Although Nash may have drawn upon both Browne and Stukeley for his understanding of Avebury, these antiquarians approached the past in radically different ways. Browne used the past to think philosophically about grand issues like death, eternity and God, whereas Stukeley utilised the past to consider localised theological issues. This difference is clearly demonstrated in Browne's claim that the Walsingham urns were Roman, which avoided contemporary debates surrounding British heritage. In contrast, Stukeley wilfully indulged in heritage disputes by looking to Avebury for proof that proto-Christianity had

⁵²⁴ See the snake's appearance in *Landscape at Iden* (1929). Causey, *Paul Nash: Landscape and the Life of Objects*, 113. Stukeley describes Avebury: 'The figure of the temple of Abury is a circle and snake. Hakpen, another oriental word still preserved here, meaning the serpent's head'. Stukeley, *Abury: A Temple of the British Druids*, 18.

⁵²⁵ Browne, *Urne Buriall and the Garden of Cyrus ... with Thirty Drawings by Paul Nash. Edited with an Introduction by John Carter*, 102-3.

⁵²⁶ Causey, *Paul Nash: Landscape and the Life of Objects*, 106.

its origins in Britain. Stukeley's closing paragraph of *Abury* states: 'This I verily believe to have been a truly patriarchal temple, as the rest likewise, which we have here described; and where the worship of the true God was perform'd'.⁵²⁷ Stukeley interpreted Avebury so that it formed part of Britain's grand, historical narrative. It is surely no coincidence that Nash turned to Stukeley in 1934, while considering national issues like the state of British modern art and accordingly the future of Unit One.

William Stukeley

Stukeley was born in Lincolnshire in 1687. He studied medicine at Corpus Christi, Cambridge and moved to London in 1717, where he became a fellow of the Royal Society and the first secretary of the Society of Antiquaries. Stukeley undertook an invaluable amount of fieldwork at Avebury during the mid-eighteenth century. Future archaeologists at the site, like Keiller, were thoroughly indebted to his work because during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries much of the site was destroyed to clear land for housing speculators. According to Stuart Piggott, Stukeley's scientific education at Cambridge encouraged him to be acutely observant in his approach to antiquities.⁵²⁸ Stukeley was indebted to the empiricism of Francis Bacon's *The Advancement of Learning* (1605), which claimed that to understand natural laws the scholar must examine the world in the particular rather than rely on the potentially fallible results of earlier, generalised studies. Bacon stated that 'if a man will begin with certainties, he shall end in doubts; but if he will be content to begin with doubts, he shall end in certainties'.⁵²⁹ At the beginning of *Itinerarium Curiosum Or, an Account of the Antiquitys and Remarkable Curiositys in Nature Or Art* (1724) Stukeley reiterated Bacon's idea:

Above all I avoid prejudice, never carrying any author along with me, but taking things in the natural order and manner they presented themselves and if my sentiments of roman stations, and other matters, happen not to

⁵²⁷ Stukeley, *Abury: A Temple of the British Druids*, 102.

⁵²⁸ Piggott, 'Stukeley, Avebury and the Druids', 23.

⁵²⁹ Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, 41.

coincide with what has been wrote before me; 'twas not that I differ from them, but things did not so appear to me.⁵³⁰

Stukeley's empirical approach to antiquity made him an important precursor to the science-orientated discipline of archaeology. In 1724, the last year of Stukeley's fieldwork at Avebury, he seemed to have been in a relatively clear state of mind as he sensibly amended the names of certain Avebury sites, like the mythical 'Temple of Ertha' to the straightforward 'Temple on Overton Hill'. However, this empiricism was starting to be compromised by Stukeley's increasing religious mysticism. His approach to Avebury began to change when he decided to take orders in the Church of England. According to Piggott, the antiquarian went over to the side of mysticism when he became obsessed with the Druids as a precursor to Christianity and even laid out a Druidical grove and temple in his garden.⁵³¹ Stukeley used his scientific fieldwork at Avebury as a weapon in his holy war. Piggott stated that the antiquarian's accounts of Stonehenge and Avebury presented 'an extraordinary mixture of sound objective fact and the most curious flights of fancy', which depended upon whether Dr. William Stukeley or the Rev. William Stukeley was speaking at that moment.⁵³² Reverend Stukeley looked to Avebury for proof that the Druids, and all the heathen philosophers, anticipated Anglicanism's understanding of the Trinity.⁵³³ Stukeley changed from a rational, proto-archaeologist to the stereotype of the eccentric antiquarian. Even by 1722 Stukeley's contemporary, the Oxford antiquary Thomas Hearne, complained: 'He [Stukeley] is a very fanciful man, and the things he hath publish'd are built upon fancy. He is looked upon as a man of no great authority'.⁵³⁴ In the year of Hearne's complaint Stukeley had started to focus on Avebury as a Druid temple and had begun a series of books related to Druidism called *Celtic*

⁵³⁰ Stukeley, *Itinerarium Curiosum Or, an Account of the Antiquitys and Remarkable Curiositys in Nature Or Art*, 1.

⁵³¹ Piggott, 'William Stukeley: Doctor, Divine, And Antiquary', 727.

⁵³² *Ibid.*, 725.

⁵³³ Reeve, 'Of Druids, the Gothic, and the Origins of Architecture. The Garden Designs of William Stukeley', 12

⁵³⁴ Hearne quoted in Stukeley, *The Commentaries, Diary and Common-Place Book of William Stukeley and Selected Letters*, 131.

Temples, Celtic Religion and Stonehenge. Abury, which was written twenty years later, presented Stukeley's ideas once these religious interests had firmly developed. I argue that the antiquarian's religious notion of Avebury inspired Nash's more romantically surreal vision of the site.

In a similar manner to Browne, Stukeley approached the past through a combination of religious sources and scientific enquiry. Such interchange between empiricism and religion was prevalent in early modern antiquarianism, in the practice of Sir Henry Spelman, John Weever and William Somner, who, like Stukeley, used the past to verify the existence of the primitive Christian Church in Britain. Stukeley admitted: 'All my studys in antiquity have ever had a regard to religion. Nor do I think any other studys are worth cultivating, but what have some aspect that way. I am thoroughly persuaded our Druids were of the patriarchal religion, and came from Abraham'.⁵³⁵ Forming connections between Druidism and the Old Testament was relatively common in the seventeenth century. At this time the Druids were attributed with a sense of Christian respectability and ideas even circulated that Noah had founded the Druid priesthood.⁵³⁶ David Coffin points to the popularity of the Druids during this period:

The poet Michael Drayton in the late sixteenth century and early seventeenth century was the first writer to devote some attention to the Druids. Drayton's poetic references were expanded by John Selden in his so-called 'illustrations' or annotations to Drayton's poem *Poly-Olbion* of 1612 where Selden identified the Druids as "Philosophers, Priests, and Lawyers," and suggested that, while the Gauls were polytheists, the Druids were probably monotheists whose invocation was to one *All-healing* and *All-saving* power.⁵³⁷

⁵³⁵ Stukeley, *The Family Memoirs of the Rev. William Stukeley, M.D. and the Antiquarian and Other Correspondence of William Stukeley, Roger and Samuel Gale*, 55.

⁵³⁶ Piggott, *Ancient Britons and the Antiquarian Imagination: Ideas from the Renaissance to the Regency*, 140.

⁵³⁷ Coffin, *The English Garden: Meditation and Memorial*, 116.

According to Piggott, Stukeley's engagement with Avebury as a Druid temple was illustrative of a general change in British eighteenth-century antiquarianism as it came under the influence of the Romantic Movement:

What more could one need to satisfy one's romantic desires? A Druid's cell, ivy-clad and dank, was really almost as good as that other romantic but rheumatic retreat, a hermit's grotto, so beloved of the period. 'Nothing, it was felt' (says Miss Sitwell) 'could give such delight to the eye, as the spectacle of an aged person with a long grey beard, and a goatish rough robe, doddering about among the discomforts and pleasures of Nature' [...]. It has been the fate of the megaliths, particularly the great stone circles, to be the victims of Romanticism up to the present day.⁵³⁸

William Blake was interested in the Druidical associations at Avebury and Stonehenge. A. L. Owen explains that the 'Druids are frequently mentioned in *Milton* and *Jerusalem*. Without moving from the background, they are, like figures in a striking tapestry, intrusive. The desolate surface of Britain after the Fall is covered with 'Druid stones'; its horizons are lit by their holocausts, and they build Stonehenge from the rocks of Eden'.⁵³⁹ Blake became familiar with antiquarianism while working as an apprentice to James Basire, who was an engraver to the Society of Antiquaries in the early nineteenth century. Through Basire, Blake worked on illustrations for the journal *Archaeologia*, published for the Society, and produced engravings for Richard Gough's *Sepulchral Monuments in Great Britain* (1786), which discussed Stukeley's discovery of 'Druid's barrows'.⁵⁴⁰ David Boyd Haycock describes Blake's work as 'deeply involved and fascinated by the antiquarian and poetic perception of the esoteric Druidical past'.⁵⁴¹ Blake shared Stukeley's idea that the Gospel was part of British culture long before the Romans reached the Isles. Boyd Haycock notes that Blake had read Stukeley's *Abury* and claims that its influence is most clearly apparent in the 'Jerusalem' passage of the epic

⁵³⁸ Piggott, 'Prehistory and the Romantic Movement', 35.

⁵³⁹ Owen, *The Famous Druids: A Survey of Three Centuries of English Literature of the Druids*, 227.

⁵⁴⁰ Gough, *Sepulchral Monuments in Great Britain*, 7.

⁵⁴¹ Boyd Haycock, *William Stukeley: Science, Religion and Archaeology in Eighteenth-Century England*, 248.

poem *Milton* (1804), when God journeys through England's 'pleasant pastures'.⁵⁴²

'Jerusalem' references the idea that Joseph of Arimathea and his nephew Jesus had travelled to Glastonbury and spread the word of the gospel:

And did the Countenance Divine
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?
And was Jerusalem builded here
Among these dark satanic mills?⁵⁴³

As Nash became more interested in the romantically surreal aspects of the landscape, Blake figured more prominently in his artistic criticism.⁵⁴⁴ The poet may have made Nash more mindful of the eighteenth-century notion that England was at the cornerstone of Christianity and, more significantly, that this cornerstone was symbolised by Avebury. Blake depicted Avebury in the relief etching, *Jerusalem, Plate 100* (1820, fig. 41), which presents three Druids constructing the circle and Avenue. On the left a figure carries the sun over his shoulder, as if positioning it in an appropriate relation to the Avebury circle below. On the right another figure decorates the moon in a snake-like ribbon of blood. The central figure stands as both architect and builder, with a compass in one hand and a hammer in the other. It is not clear if Nash knew of the etching, but *Jerusalem, Plate 100* would have appealed to his dual vision of Avebury, as it associated the site with structural purpose through its reference to the architect, while Blake made the link to romanticism.

Nash's annotations in *Abury* indicate his interest in both the design and romantic surrealism of the site. In Stukeley's preface, Nash put a cross by this section of text: 'And our *British* Druids had no images. And whatever we find in history, that looks like idolatry in them, is not to be referr'd to the aboriginal Druids, but to the later colonies of the continent'.⁵⁴⁵ According to Stukeley, the British Druids kept their non-figurative practice

⁵⁴² Blake, *from Milton*, 74.

⁵⁴³ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁴ Blake is mentioned in Nash's statement for *Unit One* (1934), 'Surrealism and the Illustrated Book' (1937), 'A Characteristic' (1937), 'A New Poetry' (1937) and 'Monster Field' (1939).

⁵⁴⁵ Stukeley, *Abury: A Temple of the British Druids*, ii.

alive until the time of Julius Caesar's invasions of Britain, whereas the blend of foreign forces in the rest of Europe adulterated continental Druidism at a far earlier point in history. Nash's annotation reveals an interest in Druidism at Avebury, although he was not necessarily interested in the religious aspect of Stukeley's argument but the underlying implication that non-figurative art had its origins in ancient Britain. Stukeley and Nash used Avebury to heighten the country's historical importance regarding religion and art respectively. I believe that this is why both men were keen to compare Avebury with ancient Egypt, which early modern scholars largely agreed was 'the oldest civilisation in the world and the very fount of philosophy, astronomy, geometry and mathematics'.⁵⁴⁶

Nash marked this section of Stukeley's text:

I attentively consider'd those banks [at Avebury], and made a plan of them, I was very agreeably surpriz'd in discovering the purport and meaning, which was to represent the *circulus alatus* or winged circle, an ancient hieroglyphic well known to those more particularly conversant with *Egyptian* monuments; and what they rightly call the symbol of the *anima mundi*, or *Spirit pervading the universe*; in truth, the divine spirit [...]. The circle and wings was the picture of the deity, which the old *Egyptian* hierophants call'd CNEPH.⁵⁴⁷

In 'A Characteristic' Nash reiterated Stukeley's link between Avebury and Egypt:

Between the gate and Silbury Hill are undulating grass meadows, at the moment ripe for the hay-makers, and so, constantly moving like water as the surface is broken by the shadows of passing clouds, and shafts of sun or an occasional breeze. You see how fantastic, how almost Surreal this landscape appears with its unprepared approach to the abrupt intrusion of a hill of such vast proportions. Yet we have seen such an effect before; the desert sands run almost as level to the foot of the Pyramids.⁵⁴⁸

Stukeley's interest in ancient Egypt has been attributed to Athanasius Kircher, whose text *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* (1652-4) promoted Egyptian culture as representative of timeless

⁵⁴⁶ Boyd Haycock, *William Stukeley: Science, Religion and Archaeology in Eighteenth-Century England*, 136.

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁵⁴⁸ Nash, 'A Characteristic', 136.

universality.⁵⁴⁹ This idea was common for early modern antiquarians, who were ‘motivated by the encyclopaedic ideal of universal knowledge and, in most cases, by belief in Adamic perennial philosophy’.⁵⁵⁰ Kircher’s text was the product of two centuries of European interest in ancient Egypt. David Stolzenberg describes how the Pharaohs had fascinated the Greeks since the fifth century BC and as Renaissance scholars examined Greek literature they revived their classical vision of Egypt.⁵⁵¹ In 1741 the Egyptian Society formed in Chandos Street, London. Stukeley was present at the first meeting, which agreed to establish ‘a society whose purpose would be to promote and preserve ‘Egyptian and other ancient learning’’.⁵⁵² Although the society was short-lived, interest in Egyptology continued with the opening of the British Museum in 1759 and its collection of Egyptian artefacts, like lamps, papyri and statuettes, donated by Sir Hans Sloane. Interest in Egypt was also generated by the Grand Tour, which became an important part of the gentleman’s education during the early part of the eighteenth century. European tourists primarily visited Italy, Greece and occasionally Egypt, to gain insight into what were perceived as the most important ancient civilisations. Despite his gentlemanly status, circumstance meant that Stukeley never left Britain. By likening Avebury to Egyptian pyramids he suggested that one did not need to leave the Isles in order to take a Grand Tour. Boyd Haycock notes that a leading theme in Stukeley’s antiquarian work was ‘the resurrection of British history as an archetype for world history, and of Britain as a country historically fit to lead the world into the future’.⁵⁵³ In a similar manner to Stukeley, Nash supplemented European history for British history through his indigenous interpretations of architectural design and surrealism at Avebury. For Stukeley, Avebury could be seen as an authentic equivalent to the mock pyramids, rotundas and temples, which were erected in seventeenth-century landscaped gardens as a result of the Grand Tour. Stukeley spent many years creating his own landscaped garden in Stamford, where

⁵⁴⁹ Clark, David, Hunter, Ucko, *Avebury Reconsidered: From the 1660s to the 1990s*, 74.

⁵⁵⁰ Stolzenberg, *Egyptian Oedipus: Athanasius Kircher and the Secrets of Antiquity*, 142.

⁵⁵¹ Ibid., 41.

⁵⁵² Wortham, *Egyptology 1549-1906*, 36.

⁵⁵³ Boyd Haycock, *William Stukeley: Science, Religion and Archaeology in Eighteenth-Century England*, 113.

he constructed a grove imitating Stonehenge. Stukeley cultivated his grove around the time the garden developed away from the rigorously controlled Tudor and Jacobean models. In the sixteenth century flowers and shrubs were planted in geometrical shapes, while rails separated sections of garden and the entire landscape was neatly distinguished from the surrounding countryside.⁵⁵⁴ In contrast, eighteenth-century gardens were generally placed in open settings, where the land surrounding the house had a regularity that gradually diminished as it extended outwards onto uncultivated nature. There is a mirroring between eighteenth-century landscaped gardens and contemporary perceptions of Avebury. In 1776 it was written that the Druids ‘believed the Deity to be infinite and omnipresent, and thought it ridiculous to imagine that He, whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain, should be circumscribed within the narrow limits of a roof. They therefore worshipped him in open temples and consecrated groves’.⁵⁵⁵ The perceived openness of eighteenth-century landscaped gardens and Avebury is interesting in relation to a drawing in Stukeley’s *Itinerarium Curiosum*. Stukeley presented a picture of Lord Hartford’s House at Marlborough, which stands five miles east of Avebury. Within Hartford’s grounds there is a huge round barrow called Marlborough Mound, which is considered to be the ‘third biggest prehistoric barrow in the British Isles’.⁵⁵⁶ While it might seem strange to have Marlborough Mound so close to Silbury Hill, Burl explains that ‘prehistoric distances should be reckoned not in miles but in hours ... it is easy to forget that to Neolithic people these places were separated by as much as an hour and a half’s walk alongside the river’.⁵⁵⁷ Burl concludes that these mounds were territorial markers separating communities. Lord Hartford incorporated Marlborough Mound into his estate and reshaped the prehistoric barrow into a terraced walk with a summerhouse on the top. Beside the Mound an avenue runs through a circular patch of grass and echoes the Avenue and circles of Avebury. Stukeley may have made the connection

⁵⁵⁴ Dixon Hunt and Willis, *The Genius of Place: The English Landscape Garden 1620-1820*, 2.

⁵⁵⁵ Anon, ‘The Principles, Learning and Manners of the Druids’, 51.

⁵⁵⁶ Burl, *Prehistoric Avebury*, 134.

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

between Avebury and Hartford's estate as neighbouring communities that mirrored one another across millennia, particularly since countryside antiquities and landscaped gardens were closely related in his mind. Stukeley travelled around England visiting the gardens of Stowe and Stourhead, which presented long vistas reaching down to pseudo-classical temples. He associated Avebury with the fashionable circuit walks of landscaped gardens when he described the prehistoric bank surrounding the circle as an 'agreeable terrace-walk around the town'.⁵⁵⁸ His antiquarian sketches doubled up as guides to Avebury, choreographing the visitor around the site's most advantageous aspects as if he or she were touring the vast grounds of a manor house. Boyd Haycock notes that Stukeley's sketches provided 'a detailed and attractive plan for those readers who could not visit the site in person. Together with the information of their labels and their accompanying text, Stukeley's illustrated books offered a perception of the whole context of the Celtic landscape that easily out-rivals modern guidebooks'.⁵⁵⁹ Stukeley was interested in how visitors moved around the complex. Nash appreciated this experiential concern when he bracketed this section of *Abury*: 'The whole temple of Abury may be consider'd as a picture, and it really is so. Therefore the founders wisely contriv'd, that a spectator should have an advantageous prospect of it, as he approach'd within view'.⁵⁶⁰ Interested in Avebury as a complex, Stukeley considered how its individual features worked together to generate a specific experience of the site. In this sense, he dealt with the Avebury equation that Nash discussed at the end of his statement for *Unit One*.⁵⁶¹

Observing the overall proportions of the Avebury circle, Nash annotated Stukeley's calculations that the 'whole of this temple ... tis comprehended within a circular ditch or trench above 1400 foot in diameter which makes 800 cubits, being to

⁵⁵⁸ Stukeley, *Abury: A Temple of the British Druids*, 28.

⁵⁵⁹ Boyd Haycock, 'A Small Journey into the Country': William Stukeley and the Formal Landscapes of Stonehenge and Avebury', 71.

⁵⁶⁰ Stukeley, *Abury: A Temple of the British Druids*, 18.

⁵⁶¹ Nash, 'Paul Nash', 81.

stadia of the ancients. A radius of 400 cubits'.⁵⁶² In accordance with Stukeley's text, the *Abury* illustrations also presented a site of grand architectural design. *A Scenographic View of the Druid Temple of Abury in North Wiltshire* (fig. 42) depicts two almost symmetrical avenues, with the circle in the middle. The stones are uniform in size and stand equal distances apart. Although order and regularity were not such prominent concerns for Nash in the middle of the 1930s, I argue that Stukeley's vision of Avebury appealed to a continuing preference for 'good' design, which *Equivalents for the Megaliths* expressed. Stukeley's perception of Avebury fed into Nash's grand vision of the complex. As stated, *Equivalents for the Megaliths* and *Landscape of the Megaliths* (1937) include Oldbury Castle hill fort, despite the landmark's distance from the Avebury complex. The panorama of Stukeley's drawing *Rundway Hill* matches the backdrop of *Landscape of the Megaliths* (1937). Both show Oldbury Castle hill fort in the left corner, while behind and to the right stands Silbury Hill and further to the right there are a couple of slight undulating hills, which may represent Overton. *Landscape of the Megaliths* (1937) demonstrates that Nash, like Stukeley, was concerned to give a strong sense of Avebury as a series of prehistoric sites. Stukeley achieved this by presenting semi-aerial views of the complex, which he drew from a number of high vantage points, like Avebury's church steeple and the Sanctuary. From the Sanctuary Stukeley offered a panorama of Rundway Hill, Silbury Hill, Windmill Hill and the parish church, despite the fact that even at this highpoint Silbury Hill is the only site that can be clearly seen with the naked eye. Stukeley manipulated his extensive topographical knowledge of the area to squash together the landscape and fit as many ancient sites as possible into one drawing. Stukeley produced factually inaccurate but impressive depictions of Avebury and enhanced the prehistoric richness of the landscape. Stukeley's drawing, *A Prospect from Abury Steeple* (fig. 43), presents a semi-aerial image that appears to conflate time through its inclusion of Neolithic Windmill Hill, late Neolithic Silbury Hill, the Roman road and seventeenth-century farmhouses. Darryl Wilkinson observes how we 'can clearly see these ancient constructions emerging within a wider

⁵⁶² Stukeley, *Abury: A Temple of the British Druids*, 19.

arena of modern settlement, with churches and villages, farms, fields, hedgerows, people, animals and so on. Clearly they are situated within the work and daily routines of southern Britain in the eighteenth century'.⁵⁶³ In contrast to Stukeley's drawings, archaeological sketches generally omit the contemporary landscape in order to concentrate on the antiquity at hand. Similarly, for the purpose of clarity, archaeologists commonly record sites as two-dimensional plans. This is not the case with Stukeley, who offered perspectival, contemporary prospects that generated an embodied, rather than detached, experience of the Avebury complex. Rick Peterson notes that these 'more synthetic views have a strange chronological ambiguity about them, the restored prehistoric circles and avenues march across a visibly eighteenth-century landscape, complete with field boundaries, buildings and roads'.⁵⁶⁴ Stukeley's tendency to mix temporalities mirrored the Neolithic integration of ancient neighbouring landmarks into the Avebury complex. The Neolithic people set the Sanctuary high on Overton Hill looking down onto the West Kennet Long Barrow, which was a thousand years old when the route along the Avenue, from the Sanctuary to the circle, was constructed. From the Sanctuary, the Avenue did not appear linked to the circle, which remained hidden by hills. Instead the Avenue looked as though it led to Windmill Hill, a structure a thousand years old and already out of use when the path was constructed. The Avenue blended different time periods, as it began in sight of the ancient West Kennet Long Barrow and appeared to lead to the obsolete Windmill Hill. Aaron Watson suggests that perhaps 'Neolithic men were somehow physically playing on beliefs about their own history during the act of moving along the Avenue'?⁵⁶⁵ The Neolithic people produced a temporal jumble, which Stukeley encapsulated in his drawings. Similarly, Avebury compressed millennia when it became associated with the contemporary art group Unit One in Nash's written entry for the exhibition catalogue.⁵⁶⁶ Later I demonstrate how these disorganising

⁵⁶³ Wilkinson, 'The Apartheid of Antiquity', 30.

⁵⁶⁴ Peterson, 'William Stukeley: An Eighteenth-Century Phenomenologist?', 395-6.

⁵⁶⁵ Watson, 'Composing Avebury', 300.

⁵⁶⁶ Nash, 'Paul Nash', 81.

principles challenged the role of Keiller, who arranged Avebury into a chronological sequence that demarcated fixed stages in human evolution.⁵⁶⁷

I argue that Stukeley's achronic approach to Avebury was a significant attraction for Nash. On page sixteen of *Abury* he bracketed Stukeley's theory for the emergence of the stones:

This whole country, hereabouts, is a solid body of chalk, cover'd with a most delicate turf. As this chalky matter harden'd at creation, it spew'd out this most solid body of the stones, of greater specific gravity than itself; and assisted by the centrifuge power, owing to the rotation of the globe upon its axis, threw them upon its surface, where they now lie.⁵⁶⁸

Stukeley's description of 'spew'd out' stones attributed Avebury with a strong sense of animation that may have helped bring the Neolithic site to life in Nash's mind.⁵⁶⁹ The megaliths derive from boulders of sandstone that naturally cover the Fyfield Downs around Avebury and Marlborough and are known as 'sarsen' stone. Sarsen is a seventeenth-century word possibly derived from 'saracen', which means stranger. If this derivation is correct then people have been personifying the stones for centuries. Appropriately, Nash labelled one of his megalith photographs *Avebury Sentinel*. Ian Walker highlights the photograph's personification of the stone:

He moved in close and photographed the stones from end-on, so that they filled the frame and seem to be moving towards the spectator [...]. The strong lighting on the stones also helps to give a sense of animation [...]. Nash also bent down so that the stones loom up against the flat sky and with 'Avebury Sentinel', he tipped the frame to add to the sense of dynamic instability.⁵⁷⁰

⁵⁶⁷ Keiller's excavations established the constructional chronology of the Sanctuary, which it divided into four phases. Smith, *Windmill Hill and Avebury: Excavations by Alexander Keiller, 1925-1939*, 244.

⁵⁶⁸ Stukeley, *Abury: A Temple of the British Druids*, 16.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁰ Walker, *So Exotic, So Homemade: Surrealism, Englishness and Documentary Photography*, 11-4.

The stone's personality is strengthened by its intense weathering, which mysteriously fades away towards the bottom of the megalith. This area of smoothness is the result of the stone being used to sharpen axes since ca.3000BC. Many of the sarsens that make up Avebury had been previously used for this purpose and archaeologists Mark Gillings and Joshua Pollard suggest that the Neolithics carefully selected some of the Avebury stones because of their appearance.⁵⁷¹ In the northeast section of the circle stands the Cove, which is comprised of two of the largest megaliths. Archaeologists are not clear on its purpose but, presuming that size matters, the stones suggest that the site was important. Before forming the Cove, it is likely that these sarsens would have already been landmarks in the field because of their proportions. Gillings and Pollard argue that the Neolithic people would have already seen the stones as important historical personalities before they were gathered together to form the Avebury circle and Avenue. They suggest that we 'interpret the careful process of stone selection and erection as a strategy for fixing the stones, as *living* entities, in their new place? Rather than Avebury being built *for* the ancestors we would instead suggest that Avebury was built *of* them'.⁵⁷² Stukeley clearly linked the stones with people in chapter fourteen of *Abury*, which describes the story of the Phoenician prince Cadmus, who built serpentine temples in Greek mythology. Cadmus ruled the people of Canaan, also known as the Kadmonites, whose land God gave to Abraham in Genesis 15:18. Stukeley explained that the Canaanites 'became traders or merchants in the most eminent degree of all ancient people in the world and traded as far as Britain'.⁵⁷³ At first the Canaanites' temples were 'consecrated to true religion; but too soon all these, and other patriarchal temples in the land of Canaan were polluted to idolatrous purposes; and probably from them the worship of snakes became famous'.⁵⁷⁴ Stukeley connected the temples of Canaan to Avebury through the symbol of the snake and, in a similar way to Frazer, merged mythologies from across the globe.

⁵⁷¹ Gillings and Pollard, 'Non-Portable Stone Artifacts and Contexts of Meaning: The Tale of Grey Wether', 184.

⁵⁷² Ibid.

⁵⁷³ Stukeley, *Abury: A Temple of the British Druids*, 80.

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid., 81.

Stukeley quoted book three of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which describes the story of Cadmus' battle with the serpent. Cadmus' men enter a grove framed by curved stones, where the serpent lies. The serpent kills the men and Cadmus eventually slays the serpent and sows its teeth into the ground to generate more soldiers.⁵⁷⁵ The planting of teeth alludes to the building of Avebury and suggests that the stones at the Neolithic site will, at some future date, become human. Stukeley goes on to discuss book four of Ovid, where 'the Sidonian women, the mourners for Melchartus and his mother, were turn'd some into stones, others into birds'.⁵⁷⁶ Through Ovid, Stukeley personified the stones and anticipated Gillings and Pollard's theory that Avebury was a human memorial.⁵⁷⁷ Stukeley claimed that 'what we observed by *Silbury-hill* and *Abury*. For these temples were prophylactick, and a sacred protection to the ashes of the defunct'.⁵⁷⁸

Stukeley reminded his readers that the preserved dead are scattered about the numerous sites of standing stones within the British Isles:

Sidonian women and others, turn'd into snakes, or stones, or birds, or trees, in the sense we are explaining them; this no more than what we daily see and hear at this time, in these very Druid temples of our own island, which we are speaking of. The people who live at Chippin-Norton and all the country round our first described temple of Rowldrich; affirm most constantly and surely believe it, that the stones composing this work are a king, his nobles and commons turn'd into stones.⁵⁷⁹

The metamorphosis that Stukeley described surely enthralled Nash, who later wrote the surrealist article 'The Nest of the Wild Stones', where stones on the Swanage Downs

⁵⁷⁵ Ovid, 'The Third Book', 96.

⁵⁷⁶ Stukeley, *Abury: A Temple of the British Druids*, 82.

⁵⁷⁷ Gillings and Pollard, 'Non-Portable Stone Artifacts and Contexts of Meaning: The Tale of Grey Wether', 184.

⁵⁷⁸ Stukeley, *Abury: A Temple of the British Druids*, 82.

⁵⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 83.

gather life and become birds.⁵⁸⁰ Towards the end of his life Nash explained his desire to animate the stones:

My association with the megaliths, in spite of the ‘impersonal’ quality of their nature, inevitably led me to my first encounter with the object personage. I gave this designation to the strange phenomena (of Vegetable and Mineral Kingdoms) which seems to possess a character beyond their nature, something which gives them a distinct *personality* of a human or animal tendency.⁵⁸¹

Nash’s wife, Margaret, elegantly described how her husband’s vision penetrated through the material exterior of an object to reach its inner spirit:

It was a vision that interpenetrated the material scene before him as in a forth dimensional manner, revealing the spirit which exists behind and surrounds all material objects. This has been the approach of all true artists whether they belong to the 12th century Chinese painters or the primitives of prehistoric times. It was an approach which was not so much romantic as imaginative, the special approach which is characteristic of our school of English landscape painting. It is the method of presentation in painting which is used by the artist when his vision penetrates through rather than remains imprisoned within his material object. Paul’s landscapes were not uninhabited, they were merely not inhabited by human beings but by the so-called inanimate natural and poetic symbols which he employed, and their function is to provide a habitation for the mind and the imagination of man.⁵⁸²

Margaret stressed that in Nash’s paintings the material scene was a vessel through which the psyche could be expressed. In a similar manner, Watson explores Neolithic man’s personal, rather than practical, relationship with the stones’ materiality. He argues that there is a tendency for the modern mindset to consider stone, soil and timber merely as resources rather than materials that hold emotional and spiritual significance.⁵⁸³ Keiller, for example, seemed to see the materials used at Avebury from a purely practical

⁵⁸⁰ Nash, ‘The Nest of the Wild Stones’, 143.

⁵⁸¹ Nash, ‘Notes on the Picture called *Farewell*’, 163.

⁵⁸² Margaret Nash, ‘Personal Portrait of Paul Nash’, 222-3.

⁵⁸³ Watson, ‘Composing Avebury’, 301.

perspective. His excavation reports discussed the erection of the Avebury stones and explained that clay was packed into the hole around the base for support. He noted how the clay was dark brown and therefore provided a sharp contrast to the pale bedrock chalk in which the stones were placed. The clay was brought from nearby Winterbourne, prompting the question of why it was chosen as packing material over the chalk that existed naturally in the earth at Avebury. Keiller suggested that the clay indicated whether the stone was properly balanced before the supporting timbers were removed.⁵⁸⁴ If the stone leant to one side then a gap appeared between the different coloured base and clay. Watson offered an alternative to Keiller's practical assumption, suggesting that the visual contrast between clay and chalk might have been an aesthetic consideration.⁵⁸⁵ Keiller did not entertain this idea and his oversight would have surely troubled an artist like Nash, who was deeply interested in the formal characteristics of the stones. Nash demonstrated his interest by annotating this section of *Abury*: 'As to the stones that composed this avenue, they were of all shapes, sizes and height that happened altogether rude'.⁵⁸⁶ In an unpublished manuscript called 'Stones' (ca.1944) Nash considered how four thousand years of weathering added to the individual characteristics of the megaliths. He stated that their 'colouring and pattern, their patina of gold lichen, all enhanced their strange forms and mystical significance'.⁵⁸⁷ Here, Nash suggested that the weathering contributed to the stones' sense of agedness and thereby their association with ancient legend. I argue that Avebury's longevity provided a source of comfort for Nash, who was living between houses and suffering from severe illness when he first visited the site in 1933. Similarly, Gillings and Pollard argue that the stones provided stability to the nomadic culture of the Neolithic people: 'Within a lifestyle of movement, clearance, regeneration and impermanence, the stability of the stones must have struck a sharp contrast with the transitory state of human life. It is not surprising that over time the stones came to stand

⁵⁸⁴ Smith, *Windmill Hill and Avebury: Excavations by Alexander Keiller, 1925-1939*, 221.

⁵⁸⁵ Watson, 'Composing Avebury', 301.

⁵⁸⁶ Stukeley, *Abury: A Temple of the British Druids*, 30.

⁵⁸⁷ Nash, 'Stones', 155.

as a metaphor for the durability, persistence and timelessness of ancestral worlds'.⁵⁸⁸ Gillings and Pollard describe a state of impermanence and regeneration that resonated with Nash's life and, more generally, Britain in the 1930s. The book *Housing and Slum Clearance* (1934) claimed that three thousand houses were demolished in Greater London under the 1930s Housing Act and twenty-one thousand tenants filled new dwellings.⁵⁸⁹ It stated that 'the present may be regarded as transitional [...]. Even standards of tastes are changing with such rapidity that industries, formed to cope with such changes, disappear and revive with cinematic speed'.⁵⁹⁰ Avebury's longevity may have contributed to the site's popularity during this time of constant change.⁵⁹¹ Keiller's logical approach to Avebury neglected how both Neolithic and contemporary people might emotionally engage with the site. He demanded that excavation 'partake in the nature of an exact science' and asserted that the 'excavator is the recorder of demonstrable fact'.⁵⁹² Nash's paintings provided a qualitative alternative to Keiller's quantitative research.

The experiential aspects of Avebury excited Nash. Eric Newton states:

At his best, he [Nash] takes the world as he finds it, and if the spectator complains that *he* never saw a sunset or a stone wall in those terms, Nash might have replied, like Turner, with whom he had so many affinities, 'Don't you wish you could?' And, in the end, the spectator, if there is any poetry in him, does catch, by a process of contagion, the vision that at first seemed so remote. Where the ordinary mortal sees an array of *facts*, Paul Nash found an *event*.⁵⁹³

⁵⁸⁸ Gillings and Pollard, 'Non-Portable Stone Artifacts and Contexts of Meaning: The Tale of Grey Wether', 183.

⁵⁸⁹ Quigley and Goldie, *Housing and Slum Clearance in London*, 102.

⁵⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁵⁹¹ An increase in motorcar ownership, a rise in leisure time and the growing popularity of archaeology also contributed to Neolithic sites becoming popular public attractions in the 1930s.

⁵⁹² Correspondence with G Dunbar, C Hawkes, AD Norrington, CT Norris, AD Passmore, Russel, DR Trelawny, FS Wallis, Warren and letters from Grant King to Taylor, 1937, 78510174, Alexander Keiller Collection, Alexander Keiller Museum, Wiltshire.

⁵⁹³ Newton, 'Paul Nash Memorial Exhibition: Introduction', 62.

Julian Thomas examines the experiential aspects of Avebury and describes the way the Neolithics choreographed themselves around the complex. Thomas discusses what is exposed and concealed at Avebury from different points within the site and he speculates on the Neolithic's hierarchical social structures that would have prohibited or permitted such views. Although it was long out of use for burials when the bulk of Avebury was constructed, Thomas suggests that the West Kennet Long Barrow formed an essential feature of the complex. He explains that the original mound was modest in size and later elongated, producing a monument that dominated a 'prominent ridge crest above the Kennet valley floor'.⁵⁹⁴ After one thousand years of use the chambers were blocked by three large sarsens, which further magnified the tomb's façade. Thomas explains:

The actions and understandings evoked by the tomb differ according to whether one views it from a distance, takes part in observances in the forecourt, or is granted access to the chamber [...]. Evidently, the importance afforded to these different perspectives shifted through time, so that the tomb eventually became a monument to be looked at rather than entered, whose external significance was privileged over a hidden and denied interior.⁵⁹⁵

After the tomb was blocked, but before the Avenue and circle were erected, at least two new long mounds were built, apparently with the sole purpose of being viewed as one moved through the valley to Windmill Hill. Thomas states that from 'this time onward it can be argued that visibility as one moves along the valley floor became a major factor in the location and character of monumental constructions'.⁵⁹⁶ Thomas reinforces his claim with the conjecture that Silbury Hill was also built as a monument to attract the gaze of those passing up the valley. The top of the Hill is visible from the Obelisk, which stands inside the circle, suggesting that activities within the henge and on the top of Silbury were intentionally intervisible. Thomas highlights a network of sites that come in and out of view as a person moves across the Avebury complex. He suggests that only a few

⁵⁹⁴ Thomas, 'The Politics of Vision and the Archaeologies of Landscape', 34.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid.

privileged persons would have been granted access to the Obelisk and been privy to the simultaneously occurring events on top of Silbury Hill. Thomas concludes that ‘while particular individuals might gain entry into the more secluded parts of these monuments, and be initiated into the cardinal secrets of the community, those denied these privileges would have understandings of their own [...]. The possibility of a polyvocal ‘reading’ of a prehistoric monument is an interesting one’.⁵⁹⁷ Accordingly, Nash’s Avebury paintings present multiple interpretations of the site as they change from a modernist to a romantic vision, from *Landscape of the Megaliths* (1934) to *Landscape of the Megaliths* (1937). It is interesting to note that Nash annotated this section of *Abury*’s preface: ‘I persuade myself this is merely monumental, erected over the grave of some great person there buried; most probably the king of the country, when this temple was built’.⁵⁹⁸ I argue that Stukeley’s phrase, ‘I persuade myself’, appealed to Nash because it highlighted the hypothetical aspect of the antiquarian’s theories about Avebury.⁵⁹⁹ In contrast, Keiller’s excavation and restoration somewhat eliminated the possibility for personal conjecture and therefore multiple readings. However, Burl begins his preface to *Prehistoric Avebury* (1979) by reassuring his readers that the site is still open to a variety of interpretations: ‘Theodolites wink towards every skyline notch where the sun once set or moon rose or where Arcturus for a brief year or two shimmered dimly down into the mists of a prehistoric evening. Ley-liners draw impossibly accurate alignments from Avebury through Silbury Hill to a random barrow or church or mile-wide hill that God happened to place in the correct position. There are even those who believe that the rings were landing-bases for flying saucers’.⁶⁰⁰ Stukeley, forecasting the speculation that Burl describes, concluded his preface to *Abury* with ‘a piece of old poetry, being some nervous lines, in no contemptible vein, wrote on our subject 100 years ago, by Samuel Danyel’.⁶⁰¹ The poem speaks of the silence and mystery of Avebury and therefore chimes with

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid., 44.

⁵⁹⁸ Stukeley, *Abury: A Temple of the British Druids*, 13.

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁰ Burl, *Prehistoric Avebury*, v.

⁶⁰¹ Stukeley, *Abury: A Temple of the British Druids*, iv.

Nash's interest in the pre-restored site in 1933. The penultimate stanza of Danyel's poem reads:

Thou shalt stand, still belyed and flandered
The only gazing stock of ignorance,
And by thy guilt the wife admonished
Shall never more desire such heaps t' advance,
Nor trust their living glory with the dead,
That cannot speak, but leave their fame to chance.⁶⁰²

Destroying the stones' silence, Keiller's excavation and restoration forced Avebury to speak clearly of the Neolithic and early Bronze Age. In 1723 and 1933 Avebury, still in its wild state, did not convey much factual information and its silence allowed Stukeley and Nash to create their own significance for the stones. Avebury's muteness related to Browne's urns, which communicated almost no information about their origins and thereby allowed Browne to speak in their place. Stukeley used Avebury's silence to promote the site as a Christian temple and, like Browne, showed Nash how to re-imagine the past for a contemporary purpose. I now detail how Keiller's restoration somewhat quashed Nash's capacity to re-imagine Avebury.

Restoration

In 1934 Keiller undertook a five-year project to excavate and restore the site. In the early 1920s Keiller financed the aerial surveys of a number of archaeological sites in Wessex under the guidance of O. G. S. Crawford. In 1923 the Marconi wireless company announced plans to erect a radio mast at Windmill Hill. Keiller and Crawford were horrified at the prospect and sought support from the public to put a stop to the proposal. The project was soon cancelled because of Government concern that the mast was dangerous to low flying aeroplanes. Although Crawford and Keiller no longer needed to fight Marconi, their proposal generated anxieties about future developments on and around Avebury. Crawford proposed that a wealthy archaeologist like Keiller should

⁶⁰² Danyel quoted in Stukeley, *Abury: A Temple of the British Druids*, vi.

purchase the site to ensure its protection.⁶⁰³ Keiller agreed and deemed the plan ‘a patriotic act which, if carried out by a few antiquaries could not but result, Marconi Co. or no Marconi Co., in a permanent advantage to archaeology’.⁶⁰⁴ In the 1930s Keiller purchased the West Kennet Avenue, the circle, Avebury Manor and Farm. The National Trust bought Avebury from Keiller in 1943. The scheme to make Avebury a public heritage site ran from the late 1930s to the early 1940s and was partially undertaken by the CPRE, whose promotion of order and control sounded loudly throughout the appeal. For example:

Avebury itself will remain in its country peace, with its agricultural needs unhampered, and the monuments of its age-long history all about it; it will be preserved not as a dead museum piece, but as a living witness to the continuity of civilisation in a corner of England ... money shall be available for ensuring that new cottages are built so as to harmonise with this setting in colour, materials and lay-out; that the planting of trees in suitable positions shall continue; that all which is truly hideous shall ultimately disappear and that Avebury shall be preserved and continued as a monument of history and a thing of beauty for all time.⁶⁰⁵

During Avebury’s restoration the undergrowth was cut back and small concrete plinths were erected where stones were missing. Fences were constructed and old ones repaired. Keiller transformed a wild relic of prehistory into a modern monument to the past. The aesthetics of the CPRE, which Nash supported in the early 1930s, seemed to dissatisfy him a few years later when he described restored Avebury as ‘dead as a mammoth skeleton in the Natural History Museum’.⁶⁰⁶ *Equivalents for the Megaliths* restored Avebury in a wholly different manner to Keiller’s restoration. Nash’s painting tidied up the site but it certainly did not preserve it as a ‘monument of history’.⁶⁰⁷ Nash’s stones are shockingly modern and stand conspicuously within the quaint Wiltshire landscape. Conversely, Keiller’s Avebury is a heritage landmark that fits tidily into the accepted chronology of

⁶⁰³ At nine years old Keiller became the sole heir of his father’s £500,000 estate.

⁶⁰⁴ Keiller quoted in Murray, *A Zest for Life: The Story of Alexander Keiller*, 24.

⁶⁰⁵ Anon, *The Plan for Avebury: An Appeal to the Nation*, 4.

⁶⁰⁶ Nash, ‘The Landscape of the Megaliths’, 8.

⁶⁰⁷ Anon, *The Plan for Avebury: An Appeal to the Nation*, 4.

prehistoric Britain. In contrast to Keiller's restoration, Causey describes *Equivalents for the Megaliths*: 'There is something formidably real about the objects both in this and the related paintings; their proportions, their placement in the landscape, and even the rhythm of the brushstrokes with which they are built up give the forms remarkable presences. Yet they are beyond analysis or classification'.⁶⁰⁸ The stones' strong geometric forms are thoroughly out of place and Nash's Avebury retains the sense of mystery that was present when he discovered the site in its 'wild state' in 1933.⁶⁰⁹ Keiller attempted to cement Avebury into Britain's Neolithic past, while undeniably modernising it with tourist information and concrete pillars. *Equivalents for the Megaliths* captures the contrast between the ancient and modern that Keiller's restoration hoped to unify. The painting emphasised archaeology's inability to facilitate an emotional understanding of the past. This frustration is experienced at the restored Roman villa in Elizabeth Bowen's novel *To the North* (1932):

Having motored twenty-five miles they sat on the stump of the Roman villa, their feet in the pit [...]. On a green notice board nailed to a post was neatly set out in white the possible date of the villa, with the conditions under which it was to be seen any day except Sundays. No paling forbade them to prod the masonry, but the mosaics, as Sir Robert expected, were all locked up, and though they had lain on their stomachs on the lid of a kind of cucumber frame they could see through the ground glass and wire-netting nothing but their own shadows on what looked like cement.⁶¹⁰

The regulated and restored monument fails to show the visitors anything but their own silhouettes. Bowen states: 'Here, where exiles had lived, today's little party of exiles cast round in spirit, to find nothing'.⁶¹¹ The characters visiting the villa are in a state of displacement. Most are staying with Lady Waters at 'Farraways' (which sounds unmistakably like 'faraway'), a small country house in Gloucestershire. The guests are

⁶⁰⁸ Causey, *Paul Nash*, 249.

⁶⁰⁹ Nash, 'The Landscape of the Megaliths', 8.

⁶¹⁰ Bowen, *To the North*, 59.

⁶¹¹ *Ibid.*, 63.

undergoing a period of extreme change, which Lady Waters attempts to alleviate, firstly by inviting them to 'Farraways' and secondly by suggesting that they visit the Roman villa. Had the villa been open the guests might have gained perspective on their own lives as they stood in view of the deep past. However, it is Sunday and most of the villa is shut up. The exiles are further exiled as they are forced to remain outside. The only thing left for these people to do is to meditate upon their own shadows. With similar significance to Bowen, Nash's grid in *Equivalents for the Megaliths* references the excavated monument's limited perspective on the past. For the grid, which is an emblem of contemporary archaeology, fades out as it faces the deep history of Oldbury Castle hill fort.⁶¹² Bowen and Nash illustrate an impasse between the past and archaeology. To adapt Hermione Lee's description of Bowen, their landscapes do not speak of ancient things but instead express a frustrated world full of 'lost traditions'.⁶¹³

Nash lamented how Avebury's excavation and restoration ruined the 'primal magic of the stones' and threatened the *genius loci* that he had discussed in *Unit One*.⁶¹⁴ Such a threat must have been poignant for Nash, who had seen the site as a symbol for Unit One in 1934. By 1935, as Keiller's restoration was well underway, Avebury began to lose its wild spirit and, coincidentally, Unit One collapsed. Like Avebury, the group embodied overlooked, radical aspects of national character. As Nash had explained, *genius loci* was the 'imprisoned spirit' of the landscape and the motive power that animated British artists as diverse as Blake and Wadsworth.⁶¹⁵ Nash described Blake's work:

His poetry literally came out of England. Blake's life was spent in seeking to discover symbols for what his inward eye perceived but which alas, his hand could seldom express. Turner, again, sought to break through the deceptive mirage which he could depict with such ease, to a reality more real, in his imagination. In the same way, we, today, must find new symbols to express our reaction to our environment. In some cases this

⁶¹² See the next chapter on the archaeologist Sir Eric Mortimer Wheeler and his famous grid system.

⁶¹³ Lee, *Elizabeth Bowen: An Estimation*, 74.

⁶¹⁴ Nash, 'The Landscape of the Megaliths', 8.

⁶¹⁵ Nash, 'Paul Nash', 80.

will take the form of an abstract art, in others we may look for some different nature of imaginative research. But in whatever form, it will be subjective art.⁶¹⁶

Within *Unit One* each artist presented subjective interpretations of the landscape and captured the *genius loci* through their various contemporary methods. The landscape took on forms as diverse as an abstraction of Yorkshire steel, a network of London scaffolding and a Victorian esplanade.⁶¹⁷ However, these disparate visions proved too weak to unite the group for an extended period of time. In April 1934 Burra wrote a letter to Nash that indicated his alienation from Unit One: 'I hope you have received the *Unit One* book. Really I've never laughed so much in my life. Barbara Hepworth is 'such fun' life is just a toy balloon full of blue circles and red circles and upper circles and round we go in circles'.⁶¹⁸ In January 1935 Unit One was under reconstruction. Its members agreed to a secret ballot to decide who should remain in the group. If less than half the Unit voted to keep a member then that member had to leave. Only Nash and Moore received enough votes to remain and the group disbanded. The more abstract artists, such as Nicholson and Hepworth, became involved in *Circle* (1937), while the more surrealist artists, like Burra, Moore, Bigge and Nash, became involved in the *International Surrealist Exhibition* in 1936. I align the breakup of Unit One with Keiller's restoration of Avebury. In the early 1930s both their identities were based on subjective interpretation, which made them vulnerable to either appropriation or annihilation. Big wireless companies, wealthy archaeologists and secret ballots were able to destroy the fragile subjectivity that Nash had celebrated within these two potential national assets.

Alexander Keiller

⁶¹⁶ Ibid.

⁶¹⁷ *Composition* (1933) by Edward Wadsworth, *Northern Adventure* (1929) by Paul Nash and *Esplanade* (1930) by John Bigge.

⁶¹⁸ Letter From Edward Burra, From Springfield, Rye, Sussex, 1934, TGA 795/10, Paul Nash Collection, Tate Archive, London.

On June 28th 1938 Keiller gave Nash and Neilson a guided tour of Avebury while it was being excavated. The diggers were working their way around the southwest part of the circle; the Kennet Avenue and the northwest part of the circle having been completed in the previous seasons. At the time of Nash's visit the southern part of the circle was rather empty. The 1938 excavation season had only begun on June 10th and, as the team did not work Sundays, they had only been excavating for fifteen days before Nash's arrival. Nash probably witnessed the uncovering of a number of stones that had been buried in the fourteenth century. It is thought that these stones were buried either because they were seen to inspire pagan practices, or to facilitate the ploughing of the fields. Burying the stones was a very dangerous practice. Underneath stone thirty-eight, now stone nine in the southwest circle, Keiller's team found the skeleton of a barber-surgeon who had been killed by the stone during the process of its burial.⁶¹⁹ Stone thirty-eight was discovered a few days before Nash arrived and the skeleton was recovered the day after he left.⁶²⁰ Nash was interested in the buried stones and their subsequent re-erection and wrote to Keiller enquiring about the subject. Although Nash's letters to Keiller were not saved, Keiller's response to Nash is evidence of the artist's enquiry. Keiller informed Nash that stone 'forty-three was re-erected to-day, and the others follow order'.⁶²¹ In a letter to Bertram, dated June 18th 1951, Keiller elaborated on his relationship with Nash:

That afternoon we walked around the monument – that is to say the entire complex of the megalithic monuments of which Avebury is comprised, and Paul was very interested indeed. I spared him much archaeological 'shop' but he remained, as he had always been, fascinated by the forms of the megaliths themselves. Apart from the interest which he took, and, I believe, really felt, in what I told him of our conclusions as a result of the years of excavations of which I had been in charge there, on

⁶¹⁹ The skeleton was identified as a barber-surgeon by the iron scissors and lance lying beside him.

⁶²⁰ Keiller's team felt it essential to devise a system of numeration for the stones. The system employed in earlier excavation reports could not be adapted to support new evidence from subsequent excavations. New numbers were therefore assigned to the stones.

⁶²¹ Typed Letter From Alex Keiller to Paul Nash Regarding The object 'ready made' Photographs and (The Avebury) Stones, 1938, TGA 7050/704, Paul Nash Collection, Tate Archive, London.

that occasion I think he did not have any archaeological, religious – he could hardly have had this since we are ignorant of any ‘religious’ significance of Avebury, - or historical interest in the site. The whole day rather resembled our letters, and was light-hearted, very merry, and, I should think, typical of him. We promised each other a repetition, but this never, I am sorry to say, occurred.⁶²²

According to Keiller, Nash could not have had a religious interest in Avebury because the religious significance of the site was currently unknown. This demonstrates Nash’s and Keiller’s incompatible approaches to prehistory. Nash was clearly interested in Avebury as a Druid temple and was not concerned with the historical accuracy of this idea. Causey states: ‘As the title of his *Druid Landscape* shows, Nash was happy to go along with Stukeley’s view of Avebury as a Druid temple, even though Thomas Kendrick’s recent study, *The Druids* (1927), had conclusively demonstrated that the Druids were woodland-based priests who may occasionally have made use of existing stone circles but certainly never built them’.⁶²³ Nash was not concerned about the lack of factual information regarding the religious aspects of Avebury. Bertram states that ‘the artist is not bound by such scientific ignorance. What Nash felt about these places was religious’.⁶²⁴ I argue that, alongside a religious interest, Nash also held an archaeological/antiquarian concern for Avebury. The numerous antiquarian books in his library, and his continual attraction to archaeological sites, are proof of this concern.⁶²⁵ The lack of historical interest that Nash

⁶²² Typed Letter From Alexander Keiller, 32 Fairacres, Roehampton Lane to Anthony Bertram, 1951, TGA 7615/1/64, Anthony Bertram Collection, Tate Archive, London.

⁶²³ Causey, *Paul Nash: Landscape and the Life of Objects*, 112.

⁶²⁴ Bertram, *Paul Nash: The Portrait of an Artist*, 240.

⁶²⁵ Nash’s library includes: *Horns of Honour and other Studies in the By-Ways of Archaeology* (1900) by Frederick Thomas Elworthy; *A Dictionary of Classical Antiquities, Mythology, Religion, Literature and Art, from the German of Dr Oskar Seyffert* (1902) by Henry Nettleship; *The Costume of the Original Inhabitants of the British Islands* (1815) by Sir Samuel Rush Meyrick; *Rude Stone Ornaments in all Countries: Their Age and Uses* (1872) by James Fergusson; *Mythical Monsters* (1886) by Charles Gould; *Wessex from the Air* (1928) by O. G. S Crawford; *The Dorset Landscape* (1935) by Geoffrey Clark; *Dorset* (1933) by Frank R Heath; *The Beauties of England* (1758) Inscribed by Anon; *The Story of Primitive Man* (1895) by Edward Clodd; *Stonehenge - A Temple Restor'd to the British Druids* (1740) by William Stukeley; *Abury: A Temple of the British Druids* (1743) by William Stukeley; *Stukeley, Avebury and the Druids* (1935) by Stuart Piggott.

displayed on his trip around Avebury in 1938 was probably due to the archaeologist's scientific methods not giving scope for a more personal engagement with the site.

In the 1920s Keiller excavated Windmill Hill at Avebury under the watchful eye of Harold St George Gray. At this time Gray was very much in the forefront of the science-orientated profession of archaeology, having received his training under General Pitt Rivers. Pitt Rivers formalised archaeological investigations that were based on rigorous methodology. Rather than approach antiquity out of curiosity, Pitt Rivers helped transform the antiquarian into a science-based archaeologist. Keiller followed Pitt Rivers' belief in evolution. With a progressive mindset, Keiller applied his advanced methodologies to prehistoric sites in order to fully understand his primitive forbearers. Under the notion of progress, Keiller claimed to be conducting his work 'in order that those who are not professional archaeologists may the better have, as time proceeds, a sounder basis upon which scientifically to build up an ever increasing knowledge of the prehistoric cultures of this country'.⁶²⁶ This mindset goes against the temporal conflation exercised upon Avebury by Nash, Stukeley and, seemingly, Neolithic man. In a letter to George Dunbar, dated 1937, Keiller revealed a little more about the philosophy behind his archaeological vision. He stated that archaeologists fall into two camps, one the excavator as scientist, the other the excavator as savant. Keiller considered himself to be the former:

The technique of the methods which he [excavator as scientist] employs, no less than the instruments which he utilises must of necessity be scientific in the strictest sense of the term, even as the attitude of mind which he brings to bear upon his task must also in its lack of bias, as well as in its subsequent restraint, be in its essence scientific.⁶²⁷

⁶²⁶ Correspondence with G Dunbar, C Hawkes, AD Norrington, CT Norris, AD Passmore, Russel, DR Trelawny, FS Wallis, Warren and letters from Grant King to Taylor, 1937, 78510174, Alexander Keiller Collection, Alexander Keiller Museum, Wiltshire.

⁶²⁷ Correspondence with G Dunbar, C Hawkes, AD Norrington, CT Norris, AD Passmore, Russel, DR Trelawny, FS Wallis, Warren and letters from Grant King to Taylor, 1937, 78510174, Alexander Keiller Collection, Alexander Keiller Museum, Wiltshire.

Keiller's intention was to date the stones and to fit Avebury neatly into the chronology of prehistoric Britain. His 1936 excavation report boasted that this hope had been fulfilled beyond expectation.⁶²⁸ In the 1930s the most accurate method of dating the circle and Avenue was to examine the burials found at the foot of the stones. Four burials were found against stones eighteen, twenty-five, and thirty-nine, and besides stone hole thirty-one. Keiller explained that the grave goods accompanying the burials helped date the bodies and thus the erection of the stones. Keiller conceded that it was possible, but improbable, for the burials to have taken place after or even before the stones were erected. However, miscalculation was impossible with stone twenty-five, where the grave actually formed part of the stone hole. Keiller explained that at stone twenty-five beakers of type B were found, which dated the Avebury circles back to ca.2600-2100BC.⁶²⁹ It is interesting to note that Keiller's excavation report thoroughly ignored what these burials revealed about Neolithic man's engagement with specific stones. He did not investigate why special rites were afforded to some of the stones and not to others. Keiller did not consider that certain stones might have been attributed with myths or personalities. There was no acknowledgement of the Neolithic imagination in Keiller's report. He went so far as to explain that the Avebury stones were not, as most people thought, unhewn blocks of sarsen but had actually been dressed.⁶³⁰ Keiller explained that the stones were dressed deliberately to conform to certain required shapes but he never elaborated on what these shapes might have signified.⁶³¹ Keiller divided the shape of the stones into two camps, which he termed type A and type B. He explained that type A generally 'takes the form of a tall stone considerably higher than it is broad, while type B is to a certain extent an asymmetrical diamond in shape'.⁶³² This is all the information that the report gave on the dressing of the stones and it did not elaborate on the stones' aesthetic significance for the Neolithic people.

⁶²⁸ Keiller and Piggott, 'The Recent Excavations at Avebury', 422.

⁶²⁹ *Ibid.*, 424.

⁶³⁰ *Ibid.*, 420.

⁶³¹ *Ibid.*

⁶³² *Ibid.*

Rather than think of the stones in terms of personalities, Keiller thought of them in terms of numbers. With the rational mindset of a scientist, he devised a consistent system of numeration for the stones. He numbered them in the outer circle clockwise. The stones of the southern and northern inner circles start with one hundred and one and two hundred and one respectively. In the same rational manner, the number of stones within the Avebury complex was arrived at by 'computation based on the average length of the intervals between stones as established by excavation'.⁶³³ According to Gillings and Pollard, Keiller's numerical system transformed the stones into

a set of sterile numbered entities, a series of carefully marked points on the meticulously surveyed but wholly abstracted plans and management agendas of contemporary archaeological discourse. Grouped by shape or spatial position but fundamentally meaningless in their own right, the stones gained meaning from their position within a large archaeological entity, the henge, itself deriving its significance from its position in a typological sequence of similarly styled monuments.⁶³⁴

Gillings and Pollard emphasise how Keiller approached Avebury in the general. Thomas states that throughout 'much of the twentieth century archaeology had been dominated by perspectives which emphasised the social whole'.⁶³⁵ Keiller did not approach Avebury in the particular and this caused him to overlook potential aspects of Neolithic man's special and intimate relationship with the site.⁶³⁶ Nash's paintings opposed the sterile numbers and typological notations offered by Keiller and exhibited an emotional response to Avebury. Nash focused on the mysterious aspects of the site that 1930s archaeological fieldwork found difficult to record. This is perhaps a reason why Nash became interested in the Druids, who 'committed nothing to writing. Their mysteries

⁶³³ Smith, *Windmill Hill and Avebury: Excavations by Alexander Keiller, 1925-1939*, 176.

⁶³⁴ Gillings and Pollard, 'Non-Portable Stone Artifacts and Contexts of Meaning: The Tale of Grey Wether', 188.

⁶³⁵ Thomas, 'Archaeology's Place in Modernity', 28.

⁶³⁶ Watson, 'Composing Avebury', 300.

were kept profoundly secret'.⁶³⁷ Causey accurately pinpoints Nash's differences with Keiller when he states:

In resisting the full exposure of the hidden past, Nash was retaining history for an elite of the imagination, for poetry, as he defined it. Nash's writing on Avebury shows that he preferred the unexcavated remains to the results of Keiller's work, which detracted from the romance of the site. Rummaging in historical texts, literature, poetry, and surviving visual evidence set Nash's imagination on fire in a way that the precise ordering of knowledge did not. At Avebury he was attracted not to exact reconstructions of the past but to the tangle of fact and myth assembled in the work of the eighteenth-century clergyman-scholar William Stukeley.⁶³⁸

In *Landscape of the Megaliths* (1937) Nash drew on an eclectic mix of resources to construct his own personal Avebury equation. The snake, sun and convolvulus derived from his own pre-existing symbolism, while also referring to Stukeley's *Abury* imagery.⁶³⁹ He bracketed this part of Stukeley's text: 'The most ancient symbolic figure of the deity was the circle, snake and wings, which we see frequently on Egyptian and other Monuments'.⁶⁴⁰ In *Landscape of the Megaliths* (1937) the snake's elevated position pervades the painting with a sense of ascension. This accords with the serpent's association with resurrection as generated by the sloughing off of its skin.⁶⁴¹ Allusions to new life are complemented by the ghostly elements of Nash's painting. A dark grey sky shrouds the West Kennet Avenue, leaving only a small patch of pink light surrounding the sun, which glows just above the horizon. The frailty of age is suggested by the long, thin shadows in the grass and the delicate colouration of the stones. Nash chose to depict what Keiller identified as a type A stone. These stones are tall and thin. Their shape and weathered features make them look like old Druids, striding across the Wiltshire landscape. A dark

⁶³⁷ Anon, 'Principles, Learning and Manners of the Druids', 48.

⁶³⁸ Causey, 'Introduction', 23.

⁶³⁹ As previously stated, the image of the sun and serpent first came together in one of Nash's illustrations for Browne's *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus* in 1932.

⁶⁴⁰ Stukeley, *Abury: A Temple of the British Druids*, 7.

⁶⁴¹ Owen, *The Famous Druids: A Survey of Three Centuries of English Literature of the Druids*, 124.

cloud looms over the Avenue and threatens to cover up the sun. The sun has created purple hues in the stones' shadows and has dyed the sky a delicate pink. These splashes of colour demonstrate the fleetingness of the moment. The composition feels as frail on the canvas as the equation must have done in Nash's mind in 1934. *Landscape of the Megaliths* (1937) is a fleeting and subjective vision of Avebury and the antithesis of Keiller's excavation report, which promoted concrete knowledge. Appropriately, in *Landscape of the Megaliths* (1937) Nash gave the stones a translucency. A red cloud shows through the top of the second stone and the green hill shows through the bottom. Nash's stones appear like ghosts. This gives the impression that Nash resurrected the spiritual, rather than the material, aspects of the West Kennet Avenue. He claimed:

I, too, have tried to restore the Avenue. The reconstruction is quite unreliable, it is wholly out of scale, the landscape is geographically and agriculturally unsound. The stones seem to be moving rather than to be deep-rooted in the earth. And yet archaeologists have confessed that the picture is a true reconstruction because in it Avebury seems to revive.⁶⁴²

Nash's painting complements Burl's speculation regarding the purpose of the site:

Death and regeneration are the themes of Avebury. The presence of human bones, the pieces of stone, the red ochre, the pockets of fertile earth, the antlers, the shapes of the sarsens, the architecture of the avenues and circles, all are consistent with the belief that Avebury was intended as a temple in which, at various times of the year, the large population could gather to watch and take part in ceremonies of magic and evocation that would safeguard their lives.⁶⁴³

Nash's stones float above the earth's surface, which adds to the sense of resurrection that Burl suggests. The floating stones have a ghost-like appearance that indicates that this might just be an empty cornfield. The furrows reach right up to the base of the stones, reinforcing the notion that these megaliths have no material quality. Keiller criticised Nash for the physical inaccuracy of *Landscape of the Megaliths* (1937). In a letter to Bertram,

⁶⁴² Nash, 'The Landscape of the Megaliths', 8.

⁶⁴³ Burl, *Prehistoric Avebury*, 200.

Keiller explained: 'I chided him then by asking him how the plough had turned after leaving furrows right up against the base of one of his megaliths in his best known painting of Avebury. Paul Nash was completely silenced of course, and we laughed a good deal. I ragged him about it subsequently, but my query remained unanswerable and therefore unanswered'.⁶⁴⁴ Perhaps on some level the insubstantial nature of the stones agitated Keiller? Nash's stones waver like ghosts and thoroughly oppose the archaeologist's restoration, which fixed Avebury so resolutely within modernity's understanding of the Neolithic period. Causey suggests that Nash perceived Avebury through his varying artistic concerns of the 1930s and this multifaceted vision prohibited any fixed understanding of the site:

Nash put a range of contemporary glosses on Avebury, adding hermetic signs to some paintings, modernising the stones in others, and in 1937 approaching the whole subject obliquely through Stukeley, so that the site seems to make a variety of different statements. He interposes himself between Avebury and the viewing public, ensuring that the monument retains its mystery and does not in his art succumb to popular treatment.⁶⁴⁵

Nash's varying perceptions of Avebury were hugely influenced by his changing perceptions of British modernism. From 1933 to 1937 Nash made the transition from British designer to romantic surrealist and, I argue, his engagement with Stukeley's *Abury* propelled this change. The next chapter continues to examine Nash's interpretations of the British landscape as a romantic surrealist. It shifts from an antiquarian focus to a focus on both antiquarian and antediluvian landscapes. The latter allowed Nash to continue his surrealist endeavours through an association with the primitive, namely unconscious, aspects of the psyche. In its opposition to a rational, scientific mindset, it also supported Nash's critique of archaeology, which now centred on Wheeler's excavations at Maiden Castle.

⁶⁴⁴ Typed Letter From Alexander Keiller, 32 Fairacres, Roehampton Lane to Anthony Bertram, 1951, TGA 7615/1/64, Anthony Bertram Collection, Tate Archive, London.

⁶⁴⁵ Causey, *Paul Nash: Landscape and the Life of Objects*, 130.

Chapter Three

The Dorset Shell Guide

My focus shifts from the antiquarian to the antediluvian to examine Nash's approach to Dorset in the middle to late 1930s. John Betjeman commissioned Nash's *Dorset: Shell Guide* on behalf of the Architectural Press in 1935. The guide revealed Nash's interest in natural history, particularly geological formations and fossils. Causey explains:

Nash used some of the most dramatic skeletal remains for the frontispiece and endpapers of the *Dorset Shell Guide*. The bottom two fish on the right-hand endpaper appear in the same relationship as 'Fossil Fishes from the Middle Purbeck Limestones of Swanage' in the 1934 *Guide to Dorset County Museum*, and the large fish on the left is 'Lepidotus Minor from Middle Purbeck Beds, Swanage', in the same museum. Each is around 120 million years old.⁶⁴⁶

Nash's interest in Dorset's prehistoric landscape focused his attention on the wild and uncivilised aspects of the county. According to Causey, Nash got most of his information from Gideon Mantell's *Geological Excursions Round the Isle of Wight and Along the Adjacent Coast of Dorsetshire* (1848).⁶⁴⁷ Mantell painted a picture of prehistoric Dorset: 'The oak, elm, ash, and other trees of modern Europe, now sprang up where the groves of palms and tree-ferns once flourished – the stag, boar, and horse, ranged over the plains in which were entombed the bones of the colossal reptiles – and finally, *Man* appeared, and took possession of the soil'.⁶⁴⁸ Despite Dorset's drastic changes, Mantell observed how traces of its prehistoric state remained in the county's petrified forests: 'Many of the trees and plants are standing erect, as if petrified while growing undisturbed in their naked forests'.⁶⁴⁹ These forests were relics of the Jurassic era, when sea levels dropped and a number of islands appeared. The islands, full of tropical forests, were flooded with seawater and preserved. The fossil trees were steadily removed by enthusiasts for their

⁶⁴⁶ Causey, *Paul Nash: Landscape and the Life of Objects*, 121.

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid., 157.

⁶⁴⁸ Mantell, *Geological Excursions Round the Isle of Wight and Along the Adjacent Coast of Dorsetshire*, 412.

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid., 396.

private collections and had long disappeared by the time Nash visited Dorset in the 1930s. However, Mantell's description obviously preserved the forests in Nash's mind and he resurrected them in a pencil and watercolour called *Wood on the Hill* (1937). In a related painting, *Wood of the Nightmares Tales* (1937, fig. 44), Nash presented the horse-tail plant that grew in Dorset's Jurassic swamps about two hundred million years ago. These plants reach urgently up towards the sun and the centre horse-tail stands frighteningly in the foreground, looking like a reptile showing its teeth. Causey describes the painting:

The pun of Nash's title makes use of the common misnomer of the plant's modern descendant, the mare's tail, while adding also the idea of the bad dream and of narrative. Nash was recalling the primitive irrationality of dreams as a kind of equivalent for the primitiveness of early forms of actual life. He used the imagery here with a narrative content: the primeval forces are emerging from the mingled sea and cloud in the distance and forming themselves into a forest.⁶⁵⁰

Nash was not concerned with the primeval for its own sake, but used it to evoke the oneiric world that could expose the most primitive parts of the psyche.⁶⁵¹ I examine how the primitive aspects of Dorset informed Nash's interest in surrealism and I explain how this shaped his approach to both natural and human history. I argue that Nash was influenced by two figures working on the fringes of continental surrealism. One of these was a tangential influence stemming from the anti-idealist strain of thought within surrealism, exemplified by the work of the French thinker Georges Bataille, and disseminated in the journal *Documents*. This line of thought reached Nash via his friendship with the painter Edward Burra, one of the few British artists in the 1930s who was likely to have had a subscription to the journal and to have had an established network of friends within continental surrealism. Another was the British artist Eileen Agar, who influenced him in quite a direct manner through their close friendship in the mid 1930s. These influences highlight the eclectic mix of avant-garde material that got washed up on the British coastline during the decade. I then contrast this material with

⁶⁵⁰ Causey, *Paul Nash*, 276.

⁶⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 279.

Wheeler's archaeological excavations at Maiden Castle, the Iron Age hill fort near Dorchester, which Nash engaged with while researching *Dorset* in 1935.

The Shell guides began in 1934 with Betjeman's *Cornwall: Shell Guide*. Between 1934 and 1939 the oil company commissioned thirteen writers and artists to produce its guides. I argue that the guides' generally took on a continental guise and captured landscapes that were fundamentally at odds with the conventional perceptions of quaint Britain as outlined in the introduction. Owen Hatherley explains:

The Guide covers, such as the one for *Wiltshire* [by Robert Byron in 1935], might be found using photomontage in a kind of Lewis Carroll version of Dadaism, while inside would often be stark, high-contrast photographs of Neolithic sites, geological formations or strange medieval carvings. It seemed to suggest that, in order to discover these ancient, almost paganistic remnants of primal Englishness, one had to use the most modern techniques – whether that meant the design innovations of the Weimar Republic or the sputtering, roaring machines that got you from A to B.⁶⁵²

This chapter examines how Nash blended continental modernism with aspects of Britain's heritage to present an unconventional image of Dorset that jumbled nostalgic visions of the country's past with an international, modernist future. In contrast to the traditional guide format, *Dorset* lacked the long tracts of text sentimentally describing already established historic places of interest and quaint beauty spots. *Dorset* opposed the traditional and popular contemporary guidebook, H. V. Morton's *In Search of England* (1927), which was in its twenty-sixth edition by 1939. Morton described Bath as 'the dear old lady of Somerset: grey-haired, mittened, smelling faintly of lavender; one of those old ladies that have outlived a much-discussed past, and are now as obviously respectable as only old ladies with crowded pasts can be'.⁶⁵³ Morton evoked a common personification of the English landscape as gentle and feminine. In contrast, Shell associated Cornwall

⁶⁵² Hatherley, 'Beyond Metroland', 41.

⁶⁵³ Morton, *In Search of England*, 112.

with Emil Otto Hoppé's photograph of a fisherman, which appeared on the front of Betjeman's guide. In 1903 Hoppé was elected as a member of the Royal Photographic Society, where he became friends with the future Vorticist photographer Alvin Langdon Coburn. Connections to the Anglo-American avant-garde are further suggested by Hoppé's 1918 photograph of the Vorticist Ezra Pound, who famously appeared in Langdon Coburn's *Vortographs* a year earlier.⁶⁵⁴ Although Hoppé's association with the avant-garde is not apparent in the photograph for *Cornwall*, I believe it is fitting that Betjeman's front cover presents work by a man who had taken pictures of avant-gardists like Pound and Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (1912). Hoppé's photograph for *Cornwall* shows an old fisherman sitting in his chair and looking contemplatively into the distance while smoking his pipe. His wrinkled face and coarse wool jumper highlight a life of hard labour. Other hardened faces appear in Betjeman's guide, like the blind Methodist woman preacher dressed in black and staring vehemently at the camera.⁶⁵⁵ In contrast to Morton's description of Bath as the sweet grandmother, these characters represent harsher aspects of Britain. Accordingly, Betjeman's text focused on the china clay industry in St Austell, the prehistoric paganism surviving at Padstow and the warlike crusades of saints that invaded the county from Ireland and Wales.⁶⁵⁶ In a similar tone, Robert Byron's *Wiltshire: Shell Guide* (1935) explicitly rejected a quaint and nostalgic vision of England, explaining that Swindon is 'a place whose existence is regretted by those who seek the beautiful without reference to human development. This sentiment may be shared by the tourist. To the resident it is unacceptable. We cannot live only in the past, and Wiltshire, as this book will show, is not such an Austria among countries as most people think'.⁶⁵⁷ The Shell guides encouraged readers to forego the popular image of

⁶⁵⁴ To make a Vortograph Coburn constructed a Vortoscope 'composed of three mirrors fastened together in the form of a triangle, and resembling to a certain extent the Kaleidoscope [...]. The mirrors acted as a prism splitting the image formed by the lens into segments'. Langdon Coburn, *Alvin Langdon Coburn Photographer: An Autobiography*, 102.

⁶⁵⁵ Betjeman, *Cornwall: Shell Guide*, 51.

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid., 8, 15 and 17.

⁶⁵⁷ Byron, *Wiltshire: Shell Guide*, 9.

quaint England in favour of a less conventional celebration of prehistoric barbarism and contemporary burgeoning industries. Accordingly, Nash wanted *Dorset* to encourage independent thought in its readers. He wrote: 'You have wheels, you have eyes, what I have seen you can find - and infinitely more beyond'.⁶⁵⁸

The Shell guides were designed to be taken out into the country in search of something new. They did not follow the conventional, hardback format of other guides but were quarto-sized, thin, heavily illustrated and spiral bound. These portable guides looked like school exercise books, were held in public and lending libraries and helped a generation of middle-class motorists explore the British countryside. Motoring was a thriving pastime in the 1920s and 1930s. Alun Howkins notes that at the beginning of the 1920s there were around three hundred thousand cars and by 1939 this number had increased to two million.⁶⁵⁹ Most of this growth took place in the late 1920s and early 1930s when Morris, Austin and Ford began producing small, relatively cheap cars. Juliet Gardiner states: 'An Austin 7 tourer (officially designated the 'Mighty Miniature', but more often referred to as a 'bath on wheels' or a 'bed-pan') cost £125 ... and the first £100 car, the Morris Minor SV, first rolled off the production line in 1931'.⁶⁶⁰ The motorcar made Britain's country roads accessible to more people than ever before. Howkins writes:

As the *Morris Owners Road Book* of 1926 put it, buying a car was buying a 'modern magic carpet'. Using it took the motorist to 'the pretty villages, the old farmsteads, besides numberless quaint features to be found in our old towns (which) all reach out of those bygone centuries and captivate us with their reminiscences of ancient peace'.⁶⁶¹

⁶⁵⁸ Nash, *Dorset: Shell Guide*, 17.

⁶⁵⁹ Howkins, *The Death of Rural England: A Social History of the Countryside Since 1900*, 104.

⁶⁶⁰ Gardiner, *The Thirties: An Intimate History*, 682.

⁶⁶¹ Howkins quoting the *Morris Owners Road Book*, *The Death of Rural England: A Social History of the Countryside Since 1900*, 104.

Despite the Shell Guides' educative appearance and widespread appeal, the series did not build upon the quaint vision of Britain described by Howkins and promoted by *In Search of England*. Morton presented the English landscape as a rural idyll that facilitated 'authentic' ways of living through its deep rootedness to tradition.⁶⁶² *In Search of England* exemplified the dominant vision of British culture that developed during the late nineteenth century in response to the increasing industrialisation of the country. As a means of escaping modernity, Morton sought thatched cottages and country churches. Ironically, this vision was reached via the motorcar, which epitomised twentieth-century technological advancement. *In Search of England* demonstrated conservatism through its map, which depicted an island surrounded by sailing ships and mythical sea monsters. Catherine Brace explains that the map presented 'Salisbury and Dorchester in the same font as Manchester, Birmingham and Leeds. This is an England of villages, market towns and cathedral cities, not of great Victorian industrial centres'.⁶⁶³ The map mimicked the work of Elizabethan cartographers like Humphrey Lhuyd in order to 'resist the vicissitudes of modern life'.⁶⁶⁴ In contrast, *Dorset* presented a contemporary map by John Bartholomew and Son Ltd. While Morton's map displayed only the most basic of roads, Bartholomew marked out the principal roads in yellow, the good motoring roads in red and the serviceable roads in green. Demonstrating the modernity of Dorset, the map highlighted the county's railway lines, railway stations and even the ferries that took motorcars to the continent.

Despite the impracticality of Morton's map, his guide was immensely popular and inspired dozens of imitations, like W. S. Shears' *This England* (1936) and the Batsford anthology *The Legacy of England* (1935). At the front of Shears' guide is a painting from the English marine and contemporary landscape artist Rowland Hilder. Hilder predominantly

⁶⁶² Despite presenting a nostalgic vision of Britain, it has been argued that Morton's guides also promoted modernity. David Matless discusses how *In Search of Wales* (1932) lingers over the industrialism of the coalfields in a far from idyllic fashion. Matless, *Landscape and Englishness*, 66.

⁶⁶³ Brace, 'Envisioning England: The Visual in Countryside Writing in the 1930s and 1940s', 370.

⁶⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 371.

painted rural Kentish landscapes, dotted with traditional, regional architecture like timber-beamed thatched cottages and oast houses. In *This England* Hilder presented a small thatched cottage on the corner of a country crossroads. Below his illustration is a quote from Virgil: 'Let fields and streams, purling through the valleys, be my delight; unambitious, may I court the rivers and the woods'.⁶⁶⁵ This romanticism was antithetical to the terse writing and textbook format of *Dorset*. As the impracticality of Morton's map suggests, *In Search of England* was made for fireside reading rather than to be taken out onto the road. Like a love story it recounted the romance between man and his country, opening with Morton as the injured hero, estranged from his love (England) in the 'inhospitable mountains' of Palestine.⁶⁶⁶ Believing he was dying, Morton solemnly cursed every moment he had spent wandering about the world. He swore that if he ever saw the Dover Cliffs again he would never leave them. Morton's guide was very much the story of a man returning home to capture his lover's heart, which lay deep in the English countryside. Morton described England:

the rich earth had borne its children, and over the fields was that same smile which a man sees only on the face of a woman when she looks down to the child at her breast [...]. I took up a handful of earth and felt it crumble and run through my fingers, thinking that as long as one English field lies against another there is something left in the world for a man to love.⁶⁶⁷

In Search of England presented the country as fertile, nurturing and beautiful. It was usual for the Morton-style guidebooks to personify the landscape as female. During the interwar years this personification inspired a sense of patriotism, associating Britain with the wife or girlfriend that the soldier had or would fight for. Howkins describes the ideal interwar British landscape: 'It is rolling and dotted with woodlands. Its hills are smooth and bare, but never rocky or craggy (the male/female word associations are fascinating), in fact hardly 'great hills' at all. Above all it is cultivated and it is post-enclosure

⁶⁶⁵ Shears quoting Virgil, *This England: A Book of the Shires and Counties*, 4.

⁶⁶⁶ Morton, *In Search of England*, 1.

⁶⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 230.

countryside'.⁶⁶⁸ In contrast, Nash presented *Dorset* through the prose of Thomas Hardy, whose Wessex landscapes could be desolate and tempestuous. Nash referred to *Return of the Native* (1878), where Hardy described fictitious Egdon Heath to illustrate Dorset's primitivism:

The untameable, Ishmaelitish thing that Egdon now was it always had been. Civilization was its enemy; and ever since the beginning of vegetation its soil had worn the same antique brown dress, the natural and invariable garment of the particular formation. In its venerable one coat lay a certain vein of satire on human vanity in clothes. A person on a heath in raiment of modern cut and colours has more or less an anomalous look. We seem to want the oldest and simplest human clothing where the clothing of the earth is so primitive.⁶⁶⁹

Egdon was harsh and crude rather than nurturing and beautiful. *Dorset* directly quoted from Hardy: 'Haggard, Egdon appealed to a subtler and scarcer instinct, to a more recently learned emotion, than that which responds to the sort of beauty called charming and fair'.⁶⁷⁰ If *Dorset* personified the landscape then it was not a female figure but an injured civilian who was 'scarred and furrowed from end to end'.⁶⁷¹ This character shares a likeness with the protagonist in Geoffrey Household's novel *Rogue Male* (1939), who, having hidden himself in the Dorset wilderness, adopts the untameable appearance of the landscape: 'I saw my eyes fouled with earth, my hair and beard dripping with blood-red earth, my skin grey and puffed as that of a crushed earthworm. It was the mask of a beast in its den, terrified, waiting'.⁶⁷² In a similar manner to Household, Nash described Dorset as having a 'gigantic face composed of massive and unusual features: at once harsh and tender, alarming yet kind, seemingly susceptible to moods but, in secret, overcast by a noble melancholy - or, simply the burden of its extraordinary inheritance'.⁶⁷³ The face of

⁶⁶⁸ Howkins, 'The Discovery of Rural England', 64.

⁶⁶⁹ Hardy, *Return of the Native*, 6.

⁶⁷⁰ Nash quoting Hardy, *Dorset: Shell Guide*, 12.

⁶⁷¹ Nash, *Dorset: Shell Guide*, 9.

⁶⁷² Household, *Rogue Male*, 118-9.

⁶⁷³ Nash, *Dorset: Shell Guide*, 9.

Dorset was not nurturing but wounded. Like Household's protagonist, or a landscape from one of Nash's war paintings, *Dorset* had a countenance irrevocably scarred by past events.⁶⁷⁴

The collage method that Nash employed in *Dorset* complemented the wild and unwelcoming landscapes he described. On the guide's back page there is a collage of photographs depicting fossilised fish and jetsam along the coastline (fig. 45). In more traditional guides photography is used to present real places for the reader to visit. As a medium, the photograph is beneficial for the guidebook because of its presumed ability to depict reality. *In Search of England* shows eight photographs of famed places of interest. Photographs of the New Forest and Land's End present undeveloped, pastoral scenes rendered through the traditional composition of landscape painting. Morton did not call into question the presumed truthfulness of his images. In contrast, Nash's photographs prompted the question of authenticity. The photographs he used for his collage were ill matched, with some of the images out of focus and others in fine detail. Nash's collage compromised the instructive nature of traditional guidebooks by disorientating the reader. It also highlighted the mediated element of *Dorset* and thereby undermined the reader's belief in the guide's truthfulness as a whole, or possibly encouraged a more idiosyncratic, personal and more 'surrealist' vision of the landscape. Nash presented the county through a strange compilation of elements, which together did not form a coherent image of place. In contrast, Morton fixed the identities of his landscapes in the reader's mind. He described his travels through Wroxeter, where he met an archaeologist who explained the Roman origins of the town. Morton stated that it only took the archaeologist's 'word for the mist to blow aside and transport us back into the past'.⁶⁷⁵ Morton aimed to 'shake up the dust of kings and abbots' and 'bring the knights and the

⁶⁷⁴ See Nash's oil painting *We Are Making A New World* (1918).

⁶⁷⁵ Morton, *In Search of England*, 142.

cavaliers back to the roads'.⁶⁷⁶ For Nash the dust never lifted. Morton went in search of an original context that Nash's collages destroyed. Nash was not concerned with the recovery of old Roman roads or Norman churches. *Dorset* did not describe the triumphant history of the county's civilisation but focused on its uncelebrated aspects, such as fossilised fish, a decaying quarry hut and the beautifully patterned Pine Hawk-moth. Nash avoided producing a meta-narrative out of his material and instead concentrated on an array of objects that were unaccompanied by well-known histories. It is difficult to establish a logical connection between many of the objects in *Dorset* because Nash often left places and things unexplained. As a result, the guide reads like a textual collage that has made an array of historical artefacts co-temporal with each other and with the present. Nash once again rejected modernity's progressive notion of history in favour of a modernist, temporal jumble. This counter-evolutionary approach to rural Britain contrasted Morton's positivist chronology. Moving from Romans to Saxons, castle to manor house, Morton uncovered a pre-established narrative of England that progressed neatly into the present.

The Anti-Idealism of *Dorset*

I argue that *Dorset's* anti-evolutionary aspect was influenced by the anti-idealism of Bataille's journal *Documents*, which I claim was introduced to Nash by Burra. Nash and Burra's relationship developed in the late 1920s and early 1930s when Nash moved to Burra's hometown, Rye. Burra's severe arthritis forced him to live in his family's large Georgian house in the quaint coastal town for most of his life. He escaped this conservative environment by making regular trips to the continent and America, where he went in search of the seedy underbellies of cosmopolitan cities like Paris and New York. Burra frequented sailors' cafes, ports and nightclubs, which became the settings for many of his paintings. He wrote to Nash from Paris in 1931: 'My new occupation is going to the Boulevard Clichy (sic) to Minuit Chanson which is glorious. You put bits in

⁶⁷⁶ Ibid.

the slot and listen to gramophone records. 'The clientele is enough to frighten you a bit what with listening in one ear and looking at the intrigues going on elsewhere [...]. Such tarts all crumbling and all sexes and colours'.⁶⁷⁷ Burra's painting *Minuit Chanson* (1931, fig. 46) presents a record shop in Montmartre, where he went to discover new jazz imports. The people in Burra's painting match the clientele he described in his letter to Nash. A woman pouts besides the entrance, wearing heavy make-up, mink and high heels. At the centre of the painting stands a man, with slightly bloodshot eyes, smoking and looking bold in his royal blue overcoat, pink shirt and red tie. These figures would have appeared at home in Bataille's *Documents*, which regularly focused its attention on jazz culture. The journal promoted the all-black jazz troupe, Les Lew Leslie's Blackbirds, arriving in France to perform at the Moulin Rouge on the Boulevard de Clichy. In *Documents* an article by André Schaeffner commented on their performance: "Dancing the blues away' in all its rhythmic and orchestral frenzy, as sonorous as it is plastic; in a volley of brass, of drums and wild gestures. Music of the eye'.⁶⁷⁸ Schaeffner described the frenetic rhythm of jazz that is presented in Burra's painting *Savoy Ballroom, Harlem* (1934). At the Savoy, a woman in a red dress, with blue frills, throws her body backwards beside the centre couple whose eyes meet as they strike a pose at one another. Unable to dance himself because of his arthritis, Burra observed the movements of the Ballroom's inhabitants. His painting presents the curving smile of a woman, mirrored in the wave of shapely bodies that interlock with one another across the dance floor. Through a composition of rhythmic shapes, Burra captured on canvas what Schaeffner described as the 'music of the eye'.⁶⁷⁹

Burra's paintings recorded the licentious atmosphere associated with jazz nightlife. In *The Tea Shop* (1929) a waitress wears a skimpy, leaf-skirt that resembles the

⁶⁷⁷ Letter from Edward Burra On Paper with Letterhead 'Le Dome, Cafe Bar American', 1931, TGA 795/2, Paul Nash Collection, Tate Archive, London.

⁶⁷⁸ "Dancing the blues away' dans toute sa frénésie de rythme et d'orchestre, de rythme sonore autant que plastique; dans une fusée de cuivre, de tambours et de gestes fous. Musique de l'œil'. Schaeffner, 'Les "Lew Leslie's Black Birds" Au Moulin Rouge', 223.

⁶⁷⁹ Ibid.

banana skirt worn by African-American jazz singer Josephine Baker at the Folies-Bergère in Paris.⁶⁸⁰ The promiscuity of the Folies-Bergère or the Boulevard de Clichy, which was notorious for its strip clubs and sex shops, was precisely the sort of place that Bataille had envisaged for a headquarters from which to run a journal like *Documents*.⁶⁸¹ In contrast to this fantasy, *Documents* actually arose out of the Cabinet des médailles at the Bibliothèque nationale, where Bataille worked. It was financed by Georges Wildenstein, who edited the well-respected art review *Gazette des beaux-arts*. *Documents* was conceived as a scholarly journal centring on ethnography, anthropology and archaeology. Bataille's promising career as a numismatist appropriately positioned him as the journal's editor. However, Bataille was a man of two sides, as part scholar and part author of the sexually perverse *Story of the Eye* (1928). The dual aspect of the scholar and debaser presented itself throughout *Documents*, much to the disapproval of some of the more conservative members of the editorial board. The journal brought together a wide variety of material that spanned continents, centuries and cultural hierarchies. Ancient Chinese bronzes were positioned alongside sculptures by the modernist Alberto Giacometti and the covers of cheap crime novels. *Documents* acted as a sort of collage that caused the narrative of humankind to become a complex maze of associations. The journal allowed for a personal, rather than factual, response to human culture and thereby challenged the ethnographic, anthropologic and archaeological intentions upon which it was supposedly based. Bataille afforded no special merit to objects and a Picasso painting had equal value to an abattoir or a big toe. *Documents* brought things together that merely echoed one another superficially, like a bronze bust by baroque sculptor Franz Xaver Messerschmidt and a leather fetish-mask. Bataille attempted to highlight the base materiality of things. He believed that humankind had an inescapable material existence that Western culture attempted to deny through its privileging of the intellect. He wrote:

⁶⁸⁰ Martin, 'Street Scene: Burra's View of Modern Urban Life', 53.

⁶⁸¹ Dawn Ades explains how Bataille and Michel Leiris had 'nourished an abortive project for a review to be run from a brothel'. Ades, 'Documents', 231.

For above all it is a matter of not submitting – both oneself and one's reason – to anything that is more elevated, to anything that can give a borrowed authority to the being I am and to the reason which arms this being. In fact, this being and its reason can only submit to what is *lower*, to what can never in any case serve to mimic one particular authority.⁶⁸²

In this regard the big toe interested Bataille because although it elevated humankind above the ape, it was the part of the body most firmly stuck in the mud. Dawn Ades describes how Bataille's article 'The Big Toe' (1929), 'accompanied by brutal enlargements of photographs of toes, by [Jacques-André] Boiffard, examines the ecstatic 'low seduction' they offer, inherent in the old taboos about women's feet. Becoming more and more insistent through the black humour is the idea that while we feel malaise and horror when certain spectacles confront us we are also seduced by them'.⁶⁸³ Bataille's reaction to the big toe recalls Burra's description of the dual sense of disgust and seduction that he felt for the people at Minuit Chanson, who he claimed were both glorious and frightening.⁶⁸⁴ This duality was a constant aspect of Burra's paintings. *On the Shore* (1929) presents three women and a sailor. One of the women waves a red handkerchief to catch the attention of an approaching ship. She is fully naked apart from a white, billowing hat that looks unmistakably vaginal. A steel-grey ship steams towards the hat and makes a clear allusion to sex. The hardness of the ship contrasts with the softness of the hat and gives this intercourse a sense of violence. The lily that blooms towards the right-hand side of the painting represents both a vagina and death and is emblematic of the seduction and horror expressed in the painting. While the image of a woman waving a ship to shore might conjure romantic associations of a sailor's wife waiting for her husband's return, the handkerchief's colour, the woman's heavy makeup and her unabashed nudity suggests a far more sordid situation. Burra, like Bataille, stripped humanity of its ideals to celebrate its baseness. This anti-idealism differentiated

⁶⁸² Bataille, 'Le bas materialisme et la gnose', 13-4.

⁶⁸³ Ades, 'Documents', 232-3.

⁶⁸⁴ Letter from Edward Burra On Paper with Letterhead 'Le Dome, Cafe Bar American', 1931, TGA 795/2, Paul Nash Collection, Tate Archive, London.

Bataille from mainstream surrealism, which he was associated with through his close friendship with the writer and ethnographer Michel Leiris and the artist André Masson. Bataille maintained a distance from mainstream surrealism because of his grave differences with the self-appointed leader of the movement, André Breton. Breton defined surrealism as:

SURREALISM, *n.* Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express – verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner – the actual function of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern.⁶⁸⁵

Bataille believed Breton's statement to be false, for while surrealism may have freed itself from society's moral concerns it remained bound to Breton's own ethical code. According to Breton, surrealism merged consciousness and unconsciousness in order to expand psychic reality. He believed that through surrealist activity, like automatic writing and the description of dreams, surrealism could transcribe the unconscious, enlighten humanity to its true self and thereby improve the world. In 'The Second Manifesto of Surrealism' (1929) Breton wrote:

It is incumbent on us [Surrealists] ... to try to see more and more clearly what is transpiring unbeknownst to man in the depths of his mind [...]. A day will come when we [Surrealists] will no longer allow ourselves to use it [automatic writing or the description of dreams] in such cavalier fashion, as we have done, with its palpable proofs of an existence other than the one we think we are living.⁶⁸⁶

While Bataille contested Western culture's privileging of the mind over the body, Breton believed that the mind would play a fundamental part in improving humanity. Mary Ann Caws states that like the alchemists, the surrealists under Breton aimed at transmuting their own base metal into their highest golden selves.⁶⁸⁷ Disapproving of Bataille's focus

⁶⁸⁵ Breton, 'Manifesto of Surrealism', 26.

⁶⁸⁶ Breton, 'Second Manifesto of Surrealism', 163.

⁶⁸⁷ Caws, 'Introduction', xii.

on debasement, Breton criticised the thinker for considering only ‘that which is vilest, most discouraging, and most corrupted’.⁶⁸⁸

Like Bataille, Burra’s anti-idealism separated him from some of his contemporaries, particularly fellow members of Unit One. As the previous chapter discussed, Unit One was largely focused on strong architectural design. Wadsworth’s *Composition on Pink Background* shows a simple arrangement of abstract shapes in grey, pink and red. To correspond with his painting, Wadsworth’s entry for *Unit One* stated: ‘I prefer to use the most direct means: the simplest forms and colours (preponderance of black, white, red and blue) and to avoid the equivocal’.⁶⁸⁹ Wadsworth’s painting represented a utopian drive, common in many of these modern artists, to engineer an ordered and tidy world. Even Nash, who only briefly experimented with partial abstraction, submitted paintings like *Kinetic Feature* and *Studio*, which reduced the world to an organisation of rectangles, squares and circles. Jane Stevenson highlights Burra’s contrast to the dominant aesthetic of Unit One, claiming that Burra, concerned with Harlem hustlers and jazz clubs, was ‘far too narrative to fit with Unit One’s agendas, as Osbert Lancaster observed in a crisp and extremely perceptive review. His use of colour was stronger and bolder than any of the other Unit One artists, and his interest in the human comedy pointed in a different direction entirely’.⁶⁹⁰ The paintings Burra submitted for *Unit One*, such as *Dancing Cows* (1929), *Duennas* (1931) and *Eruption of Vesuvius* (1929), are by far the most figurative in the book. Their closest affinity to work by other artists is Armstrong’s *The Rape of Persephone* (1927) and *Pillar Over the Sea* (1933), if only for a shared focus on narrative or human and animal forms. All members of the group were required to provide a personal statement for *Unit One*. Burra ignored this demand, causing Nash to complain to him: ‘What came of my passionate requests for Unit dope?’[...]. As we didn’t get a word out of you and I wasn’t going to bother you once I’d got away from London –

⁶⁸⁸ Breton, ‘Second Manifesto of Surrealism’, 181.

⁶⁸⁹ Wadsworth, ‘Edward Wadsworth’, 99.

⁶⁹⁰ Stevenson, *Edward Burra: Twentieth-Century Eye*, 144.

Douglas [Cooper] and Herbert Read wrote something about your work, what it's like I don't know but they did their best'.⁶⁹¹ Cooper and Read positioned Burra within the British strain of surrealism epitomised by William Blake and Lewis Carroll. This naturalised Burra within Britain's literary tradition despite the fact that a large proportion of his subjects were either continental or American and his paintings for *Unit One* presented an obvious Spanish and Parisian, rather than British, focus.⁶⁹² Upon receiving *Unit One* Burra merely laughed at the representation of himself and wrote in a letter to Nash: 'the picture of my 'studio' is the oddest thing to look at one would think I painted nothing but photos of Greta Garbo and gramophone (sic) records and rather out of focus too that gives it a mysterious glammer (sic)'.⁶⁹³ Stevenson states that 'Unit One ... enforced a sort of conformity with which Burra was not comfortable'.⁶⁹⁴ Burra's and Nash's involvements in Unit One demonstrated their differences as artists, as the former's international outlook contrasted the national concerns of the latter's personal statement. However, in the late 1920s and early 1930s the pair collaborated on collages that brought Nash into contact with certain aspects of Burra's anti-idealism, which later reared its head in *Dorset*.

The suggestion that Burra and Nash were reading *Documents* around the time they were producing collages is given in a letter that Burra sent to Nash from Paris around 1931 discussing William Seabrook's *L'île magique* (1929), which had been reviewed in *Documents* in 1929.⁶⁹⁵ Burra stated: 'Seabrook who wrote the book about Africa is here in an apartment for which he pays £10 a year!! With a mistress who he keeps in a cage and

⁶⁹¹ Edward Burra, Robert Byron, Carnegie Institute, Ruth Clark, Raymond Collignon and Cecil Collins, n.d., TAM 38.2, Paul Nash Collection, Tate Archive, London.

⁶⁹² *Dancing Cows* is clearly set in a Spanish village and includes bulls, mandolins and a small church. Causey suggests that the machine-heads in *The Eruption of Vesuvius* may have been inspired by the Surrealist-orientated French periodical *Variétés*. Causey, *Edward Burra: Complete Catalogue*, 29.

⁶⁹³ Letter From Edward Burra, From Springfield, Rye, Sussex, 1934, TGA 795/10, Paul Nash Collection, Tate Archive, London.

⁶⁹⁴ Stevenson, *Edward Burra: Twentieth-Century Eye*, 145.

⁶⁹⁵ Leiris, 'L'île magique', 334

beats we saw her yesterday being taken for an airing with a voile handkerchief tied round her head. I'me (sic) sure we shall be driven out of town by the police'.⁶⁹⁶ Burra humorously associated himself with the violence and misogyny surrounding Seabrook in Leiris' article 'Le "Caput Mortuum" ou la Femme de l'Alchimiste', which appeared in *Documents* in 1930. Leiris' article was accompanied by Seabrook's photographs of a woman with her head wrapped in leather (fig. 47). Leiris commented on how the woman suffered under this mask to satisfy the fundamental human desire for cruelty.⁶⁹⁷ Andrew Stephenson identifies this cruelty in Burra and Nash's collage *Rough on Rats* (1930).⁶⁹⁸ A woman is being stabbed through the stomach with a phallic-like sword. In a seductive pose she holds one hand on her hip and the other in the air behind her. Her face is masked apart from two large, submissive eyes. This imagery is reminiscent of Max Ernst's collage-novel *La Femme 100 Têtes* (1929), which *Documents* endorsed.⁶⁹⁹ One of Ernst's collages presents a woman in a seductive pose with one arm lifted above her head. Her breasts are on display, there is a monkey lurking at her side and a dog-faced man stares at her from behind. She is decapitated and her head has been replaced with a lampshade. This collage is an example of *La Femme 100 Têtes*' dark humour, which accords with the tone of Burra's collage *Eruption of Vesuvius*. Burra presented three machine-headed ladies in long dresses. One appears to have pulled her hand off while removing her glove and another coyly hides her machine-head behind a fan, as if she is flirting with the viewer. A table made from Anita Paige's legs carries a bowl of photographed faces, presumably for the women to use to mask their machine-heads. Causey likens Burra's humour to the 'eccentric book *What a Life!* (1911), pages from which were reproduced in the Surrealist-directed periodical *Documents* later in the 1930s'.⁷⁰⁰ This Edwardian novel comically tells the tragic story of a British gentleman through cuttings from a Whiteley's mail order

⁶⁹⁶ Letter from Edward Burra and Sophie On Paper with Letterhead "Raymond's Bar", From Paris, 1931, TGA 795/1, Paul Nash Collection, Tate Archive, London.

⁶⁹⁷ Leiris, 'Le Caput Mortuum ou la Femme de l'Alchimiste', 25.

⁶⁹⁸ Stephenson, 'The Work of Edward Burra, 1919-1936: Context and Imagery', 315-6.

⁶⁹⁹ Desnos, 'La femme 100 têtes, par Max Ernst', 64-5.

⁷⁰⁰ Causey, *Edward Burra: Complete Catalogue*, 30.

catalogue. The book exhibits the nonsense humour of *Eruption of Vesuvius*. The narrator states: 'But I was living in a fool's paradise – she loved another. The news came to me as I was eating my breakfast'.⁷⁰¹ The accompanying illustration shows a small, smartly dressed man standing behind a giant cut of meat and an oversized china cup and saucer. This more light-hearted humour is also exhibited in Burra's collage *Montage* (1930, fig. 48), which Nash professionally printed and mounted in 1935 and gave to Burra as a present. In *Montage* a woman runs down the street, away from a man with a phallic-like cane and a dog's face. A large plant has replaced the woman's head. *Montage* bears great similarities to a series of collages in Ernst's later novel *Une Semaine de Bonté* (1934). In one collage a dog-faced man follows a frightened woman down the street.⁷⁰² The woman's head has been replaced with a plant. As with *Montage*, the plant-head makes the woman both comical and vulnerable. By the mid 1930s Nash's writings on art repeatedly referenced Ernst's collage work, which suggests his developing interest in both the artist and the medium.⁷⁰³ Later in the chapter I examine Ernst's central role in Nash's article 'Swanage Or Seaside Surrealism' (1936). As Nash revisited collage in the mid 1930s, through Ernst and his printing of *Montage*, it is likely that he also reconsidered some of the dark humour that he and Burra had indulged in a few years earlier under Bataille's influence.

Dorset's anti-humanist sentiment presented itself predominantly in the Guide's focus on the primeval. In more conventional guidebooks, like Morton's *In Search of England*, human history was the focus. In *Dorset* the nation's ancestors appeared to be primitive monsters rather than cultivated Romans or Normans. *Dorset* presented a geological map of the county and described its prehistoric inhabitants:

It is impossible to treat the county of Dorset, even in a popular form, without reference to its geology. The bones of an Ichthyosaurus, which

⁷⁰¹ Lucas and Morrow, *What A Life: An Autobiography*, 87.

⁷⁰² Ernst, *Une Semaine de Bonté: A Surrealistic Novel in Collage by Max Ernst*, 6.

⁷⁰³ 'La Femme 100 Têtes' are the final words to Nash's text 'Swanage or Seaside Surrealism' (1936); Nash, 'Swanage or Seaside Surrealism', 128; Ernst's novel is also highly praised in Nash's article 'Surrealism and the Illustrated Book' (1937).

appear on the back cover, and the fossil fishes of the endpapers are photographs of specimens at the Dorchester Museum. Portland has yielded a Plesiosaurus, but the bones of gigantic creatures were found in the Hastings sand at Swanage, notably Iguanodon and Megalosaurus. Evidence of other monsters are a Crocodilian jaw at Sandsfoot, and at Dewlish, near Dorchester, the bones of an elephant.⁷⁰⁴

By focusing on the monstrous, to an extent both *Documents* and *Dorset* turned their back on civilisation. Bataille's thinking echoed Nietzsche's rejection of Socratic reason in *The Birth of Tragedy*. Reiterating the philosopher, Bataille explained that he opposed 'arguments from reason, which is weighing out of pluses and minuses in us and a calculation of clear interests. Reason itself rejects the desire to exceed limits – limits that don't simply mark off the individual's margins but those of reason itself'.⁷⁰⁵ Looking backwards in time, before Socrates promoted 'civilized' thought, Nietzsche celebrated the Dionysian aspect of pre-classical Greece: 'Here archetypal man was cleansed of the illusion of culture, and what revealed itself was authentic man, the bearded satyr jubilantly greeting his god. Before him cultured man dwindled to a false cartoon'.⁷⁰⁶ There is a counter-evolutionary sense to Nash's guide that is reminiscent of Nietzsche's philosophy and *Documents*' dethronement of the human. *Documents* rendered Western civilisation strange and unfamiliar by juxtaposing images from Hollywood with images from so-called 'primitive' cultures. The journal questioned the values that form cultural hierarchies and, as a result, was criticised for harbouring a 'secret desire to humiliate the human being and degrade him to the level of the reptile'.⁷⁰⁷ From the outset *Dorset* exhibited anti-humanist humour by opening with an image of the dinosaur *Scelidosaurus harrisonii* (fig. 49), which Nash labelled a 'former native'.⁷⁰⁸ Both journal and guidebook questioned the progress of Western civilisation and its assumed superiority over things perceived as primitive. With

⁷⁰⁴ Nash, *Dorset: Shell Guide*, 20.

⁷⁰⁵ Bataille, *On Nietzsche*, 142.

⁷⁰⁶ Nietzsche, 'The Birth of Tragedy', 53.

⁷⁰⁷ George, 'The Twilight of the Idols: 1930', 213.

⁷⁰⁸ Nash, *Dorset: Shell Guide*, 1.

Scelidosaurus harrisonii Nash reminded the reader that their country did not begin with men but monsters. Accordingly, he conjured an equally frightening image of contemporary Dorset:

Here, deep in a pit, were found mammoth bones. From now on the coast is an iron wall, seeming to be literally built of huge grey-black blocks. The seas are vicious here, and there is no more bitter war between land and water than is fought along Winspit Cliff and Dancing Ledge, where the waves can be seen leaping in an eccentric frenzy.⁷⁰⁹

Nash presented a wild picture of *Dorset* and gave the county a nightmare appearance that made it seem alluring, yet uninviting. In his own words, Dorset consists of a ‘rather frightening landscape’.⁷¹⁰ In the middle of the guide there is a double page photograph of a shipwrecked boat (fig. 50), which Alexandra Harris describes as having been ‘reduced to its hull timbers, and looking like the beached skeleton of some ancient Dorset beast’.⁷¹¹

Accompanying the photograph is this description:

In earlier times it had an evil name such as the haunt of wreckers. An eighteenth century merman thirteen feet long is recorded by Hutchin’s. Outlandish animals are captured there - the blue shark and the electric ray, sea devils and sun fishes, corals, exotic flotsam from across the Atlantic, silver ingots, coins of Constantine, rare and lovely algae and foreign shells. As the beach approaches Portland the pebbles gradually decrease in size, but where the bank ends they suddenly diminish to the size of the smaller shingle at the Bridgeport end. On the last stretch of pebbles the bleached skeleton of a huge ship rots against the inner shore.⁷¹²

Nash described a nightmarish seascape that was the antithesis of what one expects to find in a conventional guidebook. His list of exotic sea-creatures and treasures from across the Atlantic have a surrealist undercurrent as time and place are disorientated by the water. The threatening power of the sea interested Nash in the early 1920s and was conspicuous in his Dymchurch series, which ran from 1919-25. Nash moved to Dymchurch in 1921,

⁷⁰⁹ Ibid., 16.

⁷¹⁰ Ibid., 17.

⁷¹¹ Harris, ‘Seaside Ceremonies: Coastal Rites in Twentieth-Century Art’, 235.

⁷¹² Nash, *Dorset: Shell Guide*, 15.

into a little cottage situated just behind the sea wall. Causey claims that the series expressed Nash's current state of nervous tension, caused by personal difficulties, social antagonisms and primarily the aftermath of the war.⁷¹³ This tension can be recognised in the choppy sea beating against the Dymchurch wall in *Night Tide* (1922). The wall, which protected Nash's home from the water, became the focus of the series. As Causey describes it, this divider was 'man-made and solid, a bastion of certainty against the uncertain moods and motions of the water'.⁷¹⁴ By 1935 the wall had disappeared from Nash's paintings and the artist showed himself to no longer need protection from the invasive forces of the Atlantic. Nash now thoroughly welcomed its foreign influence, combing the Dorset coastline in search of artistic inspiration from the continent. Along this stretch of beach Nash also discovered blue sharks and sunfish and engaged in the surrealist's fascination with the exotic.⁷¹⁵ Louise Tythacott claims that the surrealists used the exotic 'to transgress the European image of the world'.⁷¹⁶ This is exactly what Nash did with *Dorset's* list of flora and fauna, which contained dinosaurs, mutant ewes, snakes and giant moths. Nash included a photograph of the prehistoric monster ichthyosaurus, whose skull stared disquietingly at the viewer. Another photograph showed a Pine Hawk-moth hanging against a wall with its wings spread. The moth cast a large shadow, giving it an oversized and therefore threatening appearance. Nash's imagery is not as exotic as *Documents*, however this is certainly not the quaint flora and fauna normally associated with Britain.⁷¹⁷ I argue that *Dorset* exposed the 'monsters' residing within the British pastoral.

A nightmare aesthetic also pervaded Nash's treatment of Dorset's antiquities, as he wrote of the immense size of Maiden Castle, which strikes 'awe into even the most

⁷¹³ Causey, *Paul Nash*, 112.

⁷¹⁴ Ibid.

⁷¹⁵ Nash, *Dorset: Shell Guide*, 15.

⁷¹⁶ Tythacott, *Surrealism and the Exotic*, 7.

⁷¹⁷ *Documents* ran articles on exotic artefacts like Neolithic Japanese sculpture. Nakaya, Jiujiro. 'Figurines Néolithique du Japon.' *Documents* 1, no. 1 (1929): 25-32.

vulgar mind, the impervious nitwits who climbed onto the monoliths of Stonehenge to be photographed slink out of the shadow of the Maiden uneasily'.⁷¹⁸ According to Nash, Maiden Castle was not a quaint relic of the past for tourists to photograph, but a site that continued to dominate the landscape with its strong contours. The watercolour, *Maiden Castle* (1937, fig. 51), emphasised the earthwork's undulations, which Bertram recognises as the handiwork of ancient man and argues that through them Nash proclaimed the continual habitation of the ancients in Dorset.⁷¹⁹ In this way, Nash opened up the grand narrative of history and brought past, present and future together. This was antithetical to the archaeologist's empirically established timeline, which constructed a clear-cut chronology as if from beyond the chaos of history. The life of the past diminished as archaeological excavation organised data into chronological sequence. At the end of this sequence stood the archaeologist, who believed himself to be more enlightened than the ancients he examined. Wheeler, the famous excavator of Maiden Castle, wrote that the ultimate appeal of archaeology was the link 'from mind to intelligent mind, from man to sentient man'.⁷²⁰ Wheeler's belief in linear temporality thoroughly opposed Nash's embrace of the flood tide of time. The shipwrecked boat that Nash described in *Dorset* contained the insoluble riddle of its origins and recalled the subversiveness of *Documents*. Bataille opposed the academic's desire to define objects. He complained that 'for academic men to be happy, the universe would have to take shape. All of philosophy has no other goal: it is a matter of giving a frock coat to what is, a mathematical frock coat'.⁷²¹ Like Nietzsche, Bataille looked to 'cast away the trumpery garments worn by the supposed reality of civilised man'.⁷²² Bataille wanted to devalue academic discourse. The journal pushed the boundaries between art, ethnography, anthropology and archaeology so that science started behaving like art. In his opening essay 'The Academic Horse' (1929), Bataille stressed the importance of deviation in thought. The essay described how

⁷¹⁸ Nash, *Dorset: Shell Guide*, 10.

⁷¹⁹ Bertram, *Paul Nash: The Portrait of an Artist*, 238.

⁷²⁰ Wheeler, *Still Digging*, 82.

⁷²¹ Bataille, 'Formless', 31.

⁷²² Nietzsche, 'The Birth of Tragedy', 53.

the Greeks presented the perfect picture of a horse on their coins, while the Gauls deformed this image into a sort of spider-like monster.⁷²³ C. B. Miller states that ‘The Academic Horse’ responds to archaeology’s highly noted observation that Celtic coins presented a deformation of Hellenic images. The ‘customary term for this process was ‘degeneration’, overlaying cultural diffusion with an implicitly evolutionary hierarchy of Greek original and (failed) Gaulish copy’.⁷²⁴ Archaeology’s hierarchical structure is apparent in the etymology of the discipline’s name, as the Greek *arkhaios* (ancient) is closely aligned with *arke* (beginning), which also shares a root with *arkebos* (chief). Miller explains that, unlike the archaeologist, Bataille refrained from judging the Gaul’s copy as a technical failure. Bataille conceded that the Gauls were a barbaric people who calculated nothing and had no conception of progress.⁷²⁵ However, he suggested that this barbarity was a positive thing that allowed thought to deviate and change to occur.⁷²⁶ Unlike the Greeks, the Gauls were not paralysed by ideal form. *Documents*, and as a consequence *Dorset*, countered the chronological progression that archaeology promoted and instead celebrated primitivism.

Eileen Agar

I claim that Agar’s 1930s artwork, which emphasised the primitive nature of humankind, also influenced *Dorset* and Nash’s perception of the county in general. In June 1935 the poster designer Ashley Havinden introduced Nash and Agar in Swanage, where Nash was conducting his research for the guide. They quickly became close friends and Agar joined Nash as he roamed the county collecting material for *Dorset*. While on one of their walks Agar found an old anchor chain at Lulworth Cove, which Nash photographed and later incorporated into a collage called *Swanage* (1936). Agar recalled the day:

⁷²³ Bataille, ‘The Academic Horse’, 237-9.

⁷²⁴ Miller, ‘Archaeology’, 42.

⁷²⁵ Bataille, ‘The Academic Horse’, 237.

⁷²⁶ *Ibid.*, 239.

I went over to Lulworth Cove and walking along the beach of that geological wonder, I saw something which aroused my curiosity. Digging like a child hunting for treasure, I unpebbled a long snakey monster with a bird's beak. It was clothed in stones, shells and all sorts of other marine accretions which gave it body and turned it into a remarkable object. It was an old anchor chain, metamorphosed by the sea into a new creation, a bird snake, or as Paul Nash called it, 'a seashore monster'.⁷²⁷

The metamorphosis that Agar described reflected aspects of her own work and aspects of Dorset. Her painting, *The Autobiography of an Embryo* (1933-4, fig. 52), presents a seven-foot horizontal panel containing a dense composition of both cultural and natural objects that appear to metamorphose into one another. In the third panel three pink and white shells circulate around what looks like a Greek statue. The shells overpower this symbol of civilisation and appear to reduce it to organic matter. In the second panel the circumference of a disc is dotted with circles that span the colours of the rainbow. As the eye traces the circle, red transforms into orange, orange into yellow, yellow into green and the disc looks as though it is rotating. Interlocking shapes of brilliant colour generate a dynamism that complements the painting's sense of metamorphosis. Andrew Lambirth elaborates:

From the amoeba in the first panel to the face shining with astonishment at the birth in the fourth, the composition traces the eternal cycle of renewal, not just in the case of humanity but also through the rest of creation. There are birds, fish and plants as well as figures; there are shells amongst the references to both the Greek and Egyptian civilisations.⁷²⁸

I argue that in *The Autobiography of an Embryo* culture is subsumed within the base vitality of nature as African sculptures, Greek statues and Egyptian mummies disappear into a cluster of organic shapes. Lambirth explains how the 'elements of an Agar painting have remained for the most part derived from the natural world. Still-life subjects do appear frequently, but even a vase has the veining of a leaf or the pigments of seasonal growth

⁷²⁷ Agar, *A Look at My Life*, 111-2.

⁷²⁸ Lambirth, 'Introduction', 3.

and decay'.⁷²⁹ In the late 1920s Agar trained under the Czech Cubist painter František Foltýn, who reduced painting to a composition of elementary forms. I associate this education with Agar's contemporary fascination with the Jardin des Plantes, where she claims to have been 'enthralled by fossils, their muted colour and embedded beauty. They reached us as signals in time, isolated objects, which take on the importance of a problem resolved at some moment far back beyond the mists of human memory'.⁷³⁰ Like Foltýn's Cubism, fossilisation reduces organisms to their essential forms and, I argue, that these two early influences helped establish the primordial aspect of Agar's work. I argue that Agar's interest in the base material of organic life influenced Nash's perception of Dorset. His concern for cultural history, which was demonstrated in his engagement with Browne and Stukeley, was somewhat usurped by a fascination for stones, bones and fossils. As Bertram suggests, Nash's studies of Dorset pursued 'the dim beginnings of animal life, to long before man left his megaliths and earthworks as 'footprints''.⁷³¹

Nash's knowledge of the antediluvian world was partially sourced from 'nineteenth-century "wonder books" – poised between professional papers and popular picture albums, generally written by expert authors, and designed to astonish their readers by the range and magnificence of God's creation'.⁷³² Nash collected these texts and owned James Parkinson's *Organic Remains of a Former World, An Examination of the Mineralised Remains of Vegetables and Animals of the Antediluvian World; Generally Termed Fossils*. (1804).⁷³³ Parkinson emphasised the metamorphosis of prehistoric landscapes as he explained that limestone fossils, which abound on Dorset's coastline, are 'in constant

⁷²⁹ Ibid., 5.

⁷³⁰ Agar, *A Look At My Life*, 84.

⁷³¹ Bertram, *Paul Nash: The Portrait of an Artist*, 286.

⁷³² Causey, *Paul Nash: Landscape and the Life of Objects*, 121.

⁷³³ Ibid.

motion; being impelled, in regular progression, through various forms, and modes of existence'.⁷³⁴ Accordingly, Parkinson quoted book fifteen of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*:

This let me further add, that Nature knows
No steadfast station, but, or ebbs, or flows:
Ever in motion; she destroys her old,
And casts new figures in another mould.⁷³⁵

Parkinson presented the primordial landscape as a place of metamorphosis. I argue that this is precisely how Nash and Agar saw Dorset's coastline, which famously bares traces of the Jurassic and Cretaceous periods.⁷³⁶ However, Parkinson's theology meant that his approach to Dorset was fundamentally different from Nash's. Parkinson's text opened with an engraving of a postdiluvian world, where shells sit along the coastline and a rainbow hangs over the sea. This image contextualised Parkinson's discourse within a religious framework that inserted God, and thereby the human made in his image, into the prehistoric landscape. In contrast to this Christian introduction, Nash opened *Dorset* with the *Scelidosaurus harrisonii* and thereby situated his guide within a pre-human landscape. In the work of both Nash and Agar, as Julia Costich says of their contemporary Benjamin Péret, the human 'is not the king of the universe; he [or she] constantly encounters other forms of existence in places where human beings are expected'.⁷³⁷ The traditional, early nineteenth-century Christian lens of natural history is disregarded as humanity is brought into close contact with primordial nature.

Evolutionary theorists like Charles Darwin had already usurped the Christian view of

⁷³⁴ Parkinson, *Organic Remains of a Former World, An Examination of the Mineralised Remains of Vegetables and Animals of the Antediluvian World; Generally Termed Fossils*, 9.

⁷³⁵ Ibid., 17.

Vidi ego, quod fuerat quondam solidissima tellus,
Esse fretum, vidi factas ex aequore terras;
Et procul a pelago conchae iacuere marinae;
Et vetus inventa est in montibus ancora summis
Ovid, *Ovid's Metamorphoses*, 383.

⁷³⁶ Causey notes Nash's awareness of the dramatic changes that the Dorset coastline had undergone through his reading of Mantell for *Dorset*. Causey, *Paul Nash: Landscape and the Life of Objects*, 157.

⁷³⁷ Costich, *The Poetry of Change: A Study of the Surrealist Works of Benjamin Péret*, 130.

natural history. However, Nash also rejected the progressive notion implied by Darwin's rationalist science so that in *Dorset*, as in the work of Péret, 'the untamed replaces the civilised'.⁷³⁸ If there is a belief system in the work of Nash's and Agar's Dorset landscapes then it is far more primitive than Christianity, but equally antithetical to atheistic, post-Christian science, which it replaced with something more akin to pagan nature-worshipping and myth. Agar explains that 'as an artist, the Earth, the Sun and the Moon have a greater significance ... than the highly rarefied idea of the Holy Trinity'.⁷³⁹

Agar's reverence for the natural world complemented Nash's enthusiasm for collecting natural objects. Agar remembered how Nash used to bring her curious stones that he had picked up on the beach: 'he said, he felt rather like a penguin, laying them metaphorically at my feet'.⁷⁴⁰ A newspaper article records that in the 1930s and 1940s Agar visited 'junk stores and second-hand shops to decorate her rooms. A starfish is the main decoration for her pale blue and terracotta studio. It's a real starfish, or rather was a real starfish that the artist painted red, pink and green, not satisfied with its natural colouring'.⁷⁴¹ Agar's bathroom suggested her interest in collecting natural, particularly marine, objects to incorporate into collage. The starfish had become associated with the continental avant-garde through the film *The Starfish* (1928), which was directed by Man Ray and included input from two of *Documents*' contributors, with the script written by Robert Desnos and assistant direction from Boiffard. The film suggests that, among other things, artists associated with surrealism were interested in the starfish's androgyny representing the breakdown of gender binaries. At one point in the film the female protagonist, Kiki de Montparnasse, is dressed as a Phrygian. This relates to the intertitle: 'Si belle! Cybèle?', which refers to the Anatolian goddess Cybele, who was said to have

⁷³⁸ Ibid., 131.

⁷³⁹ Agar, 'Religion and the Artistic Imagination', 793.

⁷⁴⁰ Typescript of a Lecture Entitled 'Surrealism in England in the 1930s', Given by Eileen Agar with Andrew Lambirth to the Students of Royal College of Art, 1988, TGA 881/12, Eileen Agar Collection, Tate Archive, London.

⁷⁴¹ 'Eileen Agar', *The Daily Sketch*, July 22, 1940.

been worshipped by self-castrated priests and was therefore associated with transsexuality. There is a slim possibility that Agar knew of *The Starfish* because she was living in Paris in 1928 and met Ray's close friend Paul Éluard, with whom she would later have an affair.⁷⁴² The starfish was a recurrent motif in Agar's work, appearing in *The Battle Cry* (1938), *Marine Object* (1939) and *Fish Circus* (1939). Marine life and the underwater landscape was a common surrealist theme. Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí's film *An Andalusian Dog* (1928) culminates with a coastal scene, while at the *International Surrealist Exhibition* in 1936 Dalí famously gave a lecture from inside a deep-sea diving suit and allegedly almost collapsed due to the heat. Breton's text *Mad Love* (1937) includes a black and white photograph of a coral reef and René Magritte's painting *Collective Invention* (1934) presents a fish with female legs lying across a shoreline. There is a clear analogy between the sea and the surrealist desire to plunge into the unknown depths of the psyche. More specifically, *Mad Love* expresses the coral's ability to combine opposites:

The dominion of the senses which stretches over all the domains of my mind, residing in a sheaf of light rays within reach, is, I think, fully shared from time to time only by those absolute bouquets formed in the depths by the alcyonaria, the madrepores. Here the inanimate is so close to the animate that the imagination is free to play infinitely with these apparently mineral forms.⁷⁴³

The animate and inanimate are closely associated in coral, which often flourishes in the most treacherous waters.⁷⁴⁴ The sea offered the surrealists a wealth of oddities and, as a relatively unexplored arena in the 1930s, harboured great mystery.

Agar and Nash were two artists working on the fringes of surrealism and, unsurprisingly, the coast was a strong theme in both their Dorset collages.⁷⁴⁵ Although

⁷⁴² Simpson, *Eileen Agar: 1899-1991*, 16.

⁷⁴³ Breton, 'Mad Love', 11.

⁷⁴⁴ Charles Darwin recognised that 'the strongest and most massive corals flourish, where most exposed'. Darwin, *The Structure and Distribution of Coral Reefs*, 64.

⁷⁴⁵ *Untitled Box* (1935), *Untitled Collage* (1936), *Collage Head* (1937), *Marine Collage* (1939).

the pair did not explicitly work on these collages together, Nash suggested their teamwork when he addressed Agar as ‘my fair collaborator’ in a letter from 1936.⁷⁴⁶ Agar’s collage *Untitled Box* (1935, fig. 53) and Nash’s collage *Swanage* (1936) highlight the couple’s partnership. *Untitled Box* presents a colourful underwater scene. Actual netting, shells, feathers, coral and a seahorse frame a composition of seagrass and a bright turquoise eye of Horus. The pink coral suggests the pink seafans found at the reefs between Studland and Portland, while the seahorse might have been discovered in Studland’s seagrass meadows. The netting recalls the long line of fisherman’s nets that Agar photographed drying in the sun at Bridport. The eye of Horus strengthens the link between *Untitled Box* and *Dorset* because the Egyptian hawk-god appears in Nash’s Dorset painting *Landscape from a Dream* (1936-8, fig. 54). In Nash’s painting a folding screen extends along the coastline. It overlaps a large square mirror that shows the reflection of a hawk, which stands upon the folding screen with its back to the viewer. Inside the mirror a large sun is setting, causing the sky to glow red as another hawk flies off into the distance. Legend has it that Horus, born to avenge his father’s death, refused to take his prescribed seat amongst the followers of Ra and instead sought his own destiny by soaring ‘aloft into the sky, beyond the realms reached by the original bird soul, well beyond the stars’.⁷⁴⁷ Horus attained freedom through flight. This was a feat envied by Nash, whose life-long ambition was to launch into the air under his own volition.⁷⁴⁸ A stone figurine of Horus, which Nash owned, now stands at the foot of the artist’s gravestone. By positioning the eye of Horus in the middle of *Untitled Box* Agar suggested that Nash’s watchful eye was central to her work during this period. Accordingly, Nash’s collage *Swanage* demonstrated strong links with Agar. The collage included a piece of furzewood, which Nash and Agar found in Archibald Russell’s moth-catching outhouse. On the bottom-right of the collage there is a photograph of the anchor chain that Agar discovered on one of their Dorset wanderings. She described it:

⁷⁴⁶ Eileen Agar, n.d., Uncatalogued Eileen Agar Collection, Tate Archive, London.

⁷⁴⁷ Leeming and Page, *God: Myths of the Male Divine*, 135.

⁷⁴⁸ Nash, *Outline: An Autobiography and Other Writings*, 258.

I found it buried deep in the sand and shingle of Lulworth Cove in Dorset, one summer in 1935, with only the beak projecting to warn me of buried treasure - and I carried it home in triumph to the cottage I had in Swanage for the summer - actually it was part of an old anchor chain which I suppose had lain at the bottom of the sea for ages and collected an accretion of shells and stones to give it body.⁷⁴⁹

The collage also showed a photograph of a swan bobbing on Swanage bay, which Nash mentioned to Agar in a letter: 'I have been going over my mementos and came upon this – a quaint bit of reality set against my surreality of the swan'.⁷⁵⁰ As Ian Walker suggests, the furzewood, anchor chain and swan appear to stomp over the bay 'as if in a science fiction film. It is, as it were the 'return of the repressed', coming to wreak vengeance on the urbanity of Swanage'.⁷⁵¹ Nash endowed the furzewood, anchor chain and swan with personalities and *Swanage* indicates his developing interest in myth making during the 1930s. As stated in the introduction, he named the furzewood 'Lon-gom-pa' and claimed that you could not look at it and 'say he is no more than a piece of furze. No, he is a personality'.⁷⁵² Similarly, the anchor chain was 'a seashore monster' and the swan was associated with Zeus, who transformed himself into a swan to seduce Leda, the queen of Sparta.⁷⁵³ Nash's watercolour *Comment on Leda* (1935), which he gave to Agar as a gift, depicts a wooden chair leg that looks like a swan bobbing on the water. The shape of the table leg makes the swan appear like he is wearing a hat, which identifies the bird with a common image of Nash as the hatted artist.⁷⁵⁴ Appropriately Walker suggests that with regards to *Comment on Leda* we 'read Agar as Leda and Nash as the swan (Zeus metamorphosed, of course)'.⁷⁵⁵ In contrast to the Greek myth, Zeus' domination over Leda is absent from Nash's painting, where the swan stands alone as a discarded piece of

⁷⁴⁹ Agar quoted in Anon, 'Paul Nash "Swanage"', 209.

⁷⁵⁰ Eileen Agar, n.d., Uncatalogued Eileen Agar Collection, Tate Archive, London.

⁷⁵¹ Walker, *So Exotic, So Homemade: Surrealism, Englishness and Documentary Photography*, 45.

⁷⁵² Document 'The Surrealist Object Explained', n.d., TGA 769/1/59-60, Paul Nash Collection, Tate Archive, London.

⁷⁵³ Agar, *A Look at my Life*, 111-2.

⁷⁵⁴ The photograph *Flowering Stones* presents Nash at the hatted artist. See plate 55 of *Fertile Image* (1951).

⁷⁵⁵ Walker, *So Exotic, So Homemade: Surrealism, Englishness and Documentary Photography*, 45.

furniture. The painting's title suggests that Zeus is looking for Leda, whose invisible presence is reminiscent of Agar's influence over Nash's work in Dorset.

The Wheeler Grid System

I argue that Agar also shaped Nash's perception of Maiden Castle. Wheeler was excavating the hill-fort when Nash visited the site in 1935. In a letter to Agar, Nash hinted at his disregard for Wheeler's archaeological excavations:

I had to drink half a pint of sherry and a whole bottle of claret before returning to Burlington House. Both of us were a little indistinct over Chinese names but we agreed pretty closely for all that afterward we somehow became mixed up in a meeting of distinguished antiquarians who seemed to be discussing Maiden Castle. Later still I rather tended to fall asleep at the club and got home early in the morning in a thick green fog.⁷⁵⁶

Nash's artistic approach to Maiden Castle opposed the scientific aspect of Wheeler's excavations. Unlike the archaeologist, Nash did not treat the site as an ancient artefact to be analysed but as a place still present, holding power over man as it did three thousand years ago. The hill fort's presence is notable in Nash's watercolour *Maiden Castle*, which gives the earthwork a strong anthropomorphic aspect that makes it appear alive. *Maiden Castle* presents a deep valley formed between two ramparts of a Neolithic hill fort. There are no people in the scene but, as Bertram states, the hill fort's inhabitants reside beneath the earth's surface.⁷⁵⁷ The arched ramparts, which slant slightly inwards, look like a pair of legs. This subterranean human is appropriate if one considers that a great many corpses were buried at Maiden Castle during the Roman invasion of AD43. The arched stance of the sunken legs suggests female sexuality and thereby the fecundity of the site. The regenerative aspect of the ancient landscape is prefaced in Nash's illustrations for 'Urne Buriall', however, the link to female sexuality is absent in the former and its appearance in *Maiden Castle* may have been influenced by Nash's current intimate relationship with

⁷⁵⁶ Eileen Agar, n.d., Uncatalogued Eileen Agar Collection, Tate Archive, London.

⁷⁵⁷ Bertram, *Paul Nash: The Portrait of an Artist*, 238.

Agar.⁷⁵⁸ Walker suggests that Agar prompted Nash to see the Dorset landscape in terms of gender. He explains how the anchor chain's appeal lay partly in its hybridity, as the product of the male and female imaginations of Nash and Agar respectively.⁷⁵⁹ Incorporating the anchor chain into collages and sculpture, Agar described how the object 'metamorphosed into a new creation, a bird snake, or as Paul Nash called it, a "seashore monster". The sea and land sometimes play together like *man and wife* [my italics], and achieve astonishing results'.⁷⁶⁰ Walker notes that in 'Nash's work, the connection between woman and landscape had once been overt. In the painting *Vision of Evening* (1911), for example, a woman's face hovers in the sky above a rounded landscape, which becomes her body. That overtness had long been suppressed but the resonance was never lost'.⁷⁶¹ Brought off its pedestal, the female influence was taken out of the sky and grounded within the contours of ancient earthworks. As a constructor of form, Agar was not merely an attractive muse for Nash but, as he had stated, was his 'fair collaborator'.⁷⁶² Her painting *The Family Trio* (1931) promotes the strength of female fertility, which I argue is also expressed in Nash's *Maiden Castle*. *The Family Trio* presents a woman, man and baby. The woman's red head is reminiscent of either a vagina or a heart and themes of sexuality or romanticism are reinforced by a background of indigo sky, with a crescent moon that casts light on the sea. The coastal setting has an air of classicism and the mosaic floor supports this mood.⁷⁶³ The woman's hips thrust out towards the man, who is hunched over a stick. He looks aghast and, unlike the spotlighted woman, he is mostly in shadow. The baby is positioned within the recess of the mother's body. Their closeness suggests that the baby is still in the womb and the circle surrounding the offspring strengthens this suggestion. It must be noted that Agar's sense of fertility has a powerful and somewhat intimidating quality that opposes the gentleness

⁷⁵⁸ See my argument for *Funeral Pyre* in chapter one.

⁷⁵⁹ Walker, *So Exotic, So Homemade: Surrealism, Englishness and Documentary Photography*, 45.

⁷⁶⁰ Agar, *A Look at My Life*, 112.

⁷⁶¹ Walker, *So Exotic, So Homemade: Surrealism, Englishness and Documentary Photography*, 45.

⁷⁶² Eileen Agar, n.d., Uncatalogued Eileen Agar Collection, Tate Archive, London.

⁷⁶³ *The Family Trio* is reminiscent of Picasso's neoclassical oil on wood called *Family By The Sea* (1922).

of Morton's feminised landscapes. Nash clearly recognised the strength of Agar's sex when he wrote: 'Eileen, you are obviously very delightful but it is refreshing to find someone who will not rest upon being but overflowed into attractive actions'.⁷⁶⁴ Similarly, Lambirth claims that 'Agar's work has been tamely praised for its charm. But the core of her art does not reside in some superficial attractiveness, and if charm there be it is the spontaneous charm of nature, witnessed through the rhythms and images of Agar's work. There is an element of toughness which underscores the lyricism'.⁷⁶⁵ Agar stressed the dominance of the female principle:

In Europe, the importance of the unconscious in all forms of Literature and Art establishes the dominance of a feminine type of imagination over the classical and more masculine order. Apart from rampant and hysterical militarism, there is no male element left in Europe for the intellectual and rational conception of life has given way to a more miraculous creative interpretation, and artistic and imaginative life is under the sway of womb-magic.⁷⁶⁶

The idea of 'womb-magic' relates to the creative imagination that generates new forms. Michel Remy describes Agar: 'Indeed, in most of her collages and paintings, birds mirror leaves, leaves mirror human hands, and bones, festoons, guitars and fish join together in the same ritual celebration of *pure* creation'.⁷⁶⁷ *The Family Trio* demonstrates how Agar used antiquity, with the mosaic floor and the coastal scene, as a space for this generation. The combination of antiquity and rebirth, which are also found in paintings like *The Autobiography of an Embryo*, is subtly hinted at in *Maiden Castle*, where the Neolithic site transfigures into a female outline.

⁷⁶⁴ Eileen Agar, n.d., Uncatalogued Eileen Agar Collection, Tate Archive, London.

⁷⁶⁵ Lambirth, 'Introduction', 6.

⁷⁶⁶ Typescript of a Lecture Entitled 'Surrealism in England in the 1930s', Given by Eileen Agar with Andrew Lambirth to the Students of Royal College of Art, 1988, TGA 881/12, Eileen Agar Collection, Tate Archive, London.

⁷⁶⁷ Remy 'Surrealism's Vertiginous Descent on Britain', 47.

Dorset includes an aerial photograph of Maiden Castle (fig. 55), which transforms the earthwork into a series of flat and concentric ovals and highlights the simple strength of its form. Aerial photography had begun in the mid-nineteenth century and developed significantly during the First World War as an aid for officers to plan and observe attacks. It was utilised for archaeological purposes by O. G. S. Crawford in 1922 when the RAF took a selection of aerial photographs over Hampshire. For some time Crawford had been trying to map lynchets, ancient banks formed by ploughing the hillside, in the south of England. The RAF's photographs displayed their precise layout and even enabled Crawford to distinguish between different historical periods. Leo Deuel states: 'Since any more or less geometric arrangement almost invariably betrays a human builder, the airborne archaeologist has relatively little difficulty in identifying artificial structures, no matter how much their substance has been reduced'.⁷⁶⁸ The aerial photograph was vital for the archaeologist because it captured prehistoric markings that were imperceptible from the ground. Kitty Hauser explains: 'Using the metaphor of a carpet whose pattern is revealed when seen from a height, Crawford enthused about the capacity of the aerial view to convert chaos into order'.⁷⁶⁹ Accordingly, Nash's aerial image of Maiden Castle simplified the hill fort by presenting it on a two-dimensional plane. From this perspective the representation of a solid object in space dissipated, reducing the earthwork to an association of lines. From the air, Maiden Castle looked more like a work of abstract art than a Neolithic settlement. John Piper associated ancient earthworks with abstract painting via aerial photography in an article called 'Prehistory from the Air' (1937). Comparing an aerial photograph of Silbury Hill with a painting by Joan Miró, he wrote:

So the horizon line vanishes, from the air. It has also vanished (nearly) from painting [...]. It is not really strange that air photography began in the 80s, and that about the 80s the horizon in landscapes (with Courbet or Cézanne) was getting much less conscious of itself – no more self-

⁷⁶⁸ Deuel, *Flights into Yesterday: The Story of Aerial Archaeology*, 5.

⁷⁶⁹ Hauser, *Shadow Sites: Photography, Archaeology, and the British Landscape 1927-1955*, 155.

conscious than the foreground, or the background, or the middle distance, all of which were becoming parts of the same consistent parcel.⁷⁷⁰

The aerial image reduced prehistoric form as if it were under the ascetic hands of Miró, whose work after 1924 became detached from the terrestrial plane and presented the interrelation of stark simple shapes on a flat surface. Miró's painting *Head of a Catalan Peasant* (1925) reduces the human to two thin lines, with circles for hands and a red, triangular head. In the absence of spatial depth, he struck the viewer with the flat field of the canvas. Miró claimed that paintings like *Head of a Catalan Peasant* were conceived of 'like a bolt from the blue, absolutely detached from the outer world (the world of men who have two eyes in the space below their forehead)'.⁷⁷¹ In a similar manner to Miró's painting, the three-dimensional object is dissolved by aerial photography. As Piper stated: 'To the camera from the air, the hill is not much of a hill'.⁷⁷² He contrasts the aerial photograph of Silbury Hill with Stukeley's antiquarian sketch of the monument. In opposition to the flat aerial image, Stukeley showed 'the effort and the feeling for shape of the men who built it [Silbury]. Size and contour are all-important'.⁷⁷³ Aerial photography opposed the strong undulations in both Stukeley's *Silbury Hill* and Nash's *Maiden Castle*. However, all three images exemplified the earthworks' contemporariness, the former through its likeness to abstract art and the sketch and painting through the ramparts that express the continuing presence of the ancients within the landscape.

Unlike Nash's earlier encounters with antiquity, there were no famous antiquarians attached to Maiden Castle that could feed his imagination. However, other artists interested in the site in the mid 1930s may have helped inspire his creative engagement. In his autobiography, *Still Digging* (1955), Wheeler gave a summary of some of the creative interest in the site. He noted that T. E. Lawrence, John Drinkwater and

⁷⁷⁰ Piper, 'Prehistory from the Air', 5.

⁷⁷¹ Miró, *Joan Miró: Selected Writings and Interviews*, 86.

⁷⁷² Piper, 'Prehistory from the Air', 7.

⁷⁷³ Ibid.

Augustus John visited Maiden Castle while excavations were being carried out. Nash was a friend of Lawrence and Drinkwater and provided illustrations to books by both men.⁷⁷⁴ The county's most famous writer, Thomas Hardy, may have inspired this flocking of artists to Maiden Castle. Wheeler introduced the site with Hardy's description of the hill fort:

The profile of the whole stupendous ruin, as seen at a distance of a mile eastward, is clearly cut as that of marble inlay. It is varied with protuberances, which from hearabouts have the animal aspects of warts, wens, knuckles and hips. It may indeed be likened to an enormous many-limbed organism of an antediluvian time ... lying lifeless, and covered with a thin green cloth, which hides its substance, while revealing its contour.⁷⁷⁵

Before 1934 very little was known about the hill fort, giving Hardy the freedom to imagine some mythological creature hidden beneath the earth. Wheeler's excavation uncovered what had remained hidden beneath the surface of Maiden Castle for thousands of years and thereby threatened Hardy's imaginative engagement with the site. The archaeologist recalled that before the excavation the then director of the British Museum, Sir George Hill, told him that Maiden Castle was 'a fine place to dig – and a fine place to leave undug'.⁷⁷⁶ Although Wheeler accused Hill of archaic sentiment, he admitted to having a sneaking sympathy with his point of view.⁷⁷⁷ This highlights how Wheeler's scientific discourse maintained a vestige of romanticism, which linked him to the artistic associations surrounding the site. However, Wheeler's imaginative interest in Maiden Castle might have been a merely practical move, as the attention of Lawrence and John would have probably expanded the narrow discipline of archaeology into the arts and popularised the excavations. Wheeler was an avid promoter of archaeology and proudly described the 'hundreds of little folk from shops and factories and back-kitchens,

⁷⁷⁴ *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1926) by T. E. Lawrence and *Cotswold Characters* (1921) by John Drinkwater.

⁷⁷⁵ Hardy, 'A Tryst in an Ancient Earthwork', 172-1.

⁷⁷⁶ Hill quoted in Wheeler, *Still Digging*, 92.

⁷⁷⁷ Wheeler, *Still Digging*, 92.

who streamed on to the hill-top [Maiden Castle], day after day, and listened to the lecturettes which my students were carefully drilled to offer them, and put their pennies and their shillings into the box'.⁷⁷⁸ The point of Wheeler's publicity was to make money for archaeology, which had only recently emerged as an academic discipline. Ronald Clark explains:

Here, on the fringe of holiday country, was a chance which he seized with both hands. Visitors to the site were encouraged, and a rota of students was set up to act as guides. Postcards showing various aspects of the work were printed, and no fewer than sixty-four thousand of them were sold at 1s each. Scraps of surplus pottery were marked in Indian ink and offered for a few pence. All these imaginative methods helped to interest the layman in what was being done before his eyes.⁷⁷⁹

Wheeler and his team raised archaeology's popularity to such a degree that by 1954 ninety per cent of British fieldwork was tax funded. Wheeler popularised archaeology through sensationalising events, therefore his discourse can be seen as part scientific and part fantastical. Firstly, I focus on the former and analyse Nash's response to Wheeler's fastidious excavation techniques.

In 1937 the Institute of Archaeology was founded in London. It helped establish archaeology as a science by announcing itself as a school 'designed to provide properly classified collections of material, derived wherever possible from scientifically conducted excavations, for the use of the student and research worker under normal laboratory conditions'.⁷⁸⁰ Wheeler was the first director of the Institute, which trained hundreds of students in the scientific approach to archaeology. As a natural showman, Wheeler extended this education to the wider public, arranging regular national newspaper articles on archaeological digs and presenting archaeological programmes on the radio. By the 1950s the discipline's popularity had grown so profusely that Wheeler claimed that 'today

⁷⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁷⁹ Clark, *Sir Mortimer Wheeler*, 65.

⁷⁸⁰ Wheeler, *Still Digging*, 80.

we can scarcely touch history without touching archaeology'.⁷⁸¹ The most significant development Wheeler brought to the archaeological discipline was his grid system, which was a meticulous excavation technique that partitioned the excavation area into five metre squares separated by baulks of unexcavated land. Strata denoting the age of the earth divided each section horizontally. The sections and strata levels allowed the archaeologist to record the spatial and temporal location of artefacts. Wheeler wrote that with this method 'both excavation and record developed easily side by side, without risk of error and without headache'.⁷⁸² Wheeler's peers commended him for the level of control that such excavation commanded. This method, which was first developed at Maiden Castle, became widely adopted within the archaeological discipline. The rigorous methodology of the system testified to Wheeler's belief that perfected technique would result in a more perfect understanding of the past. Julian Thomas discusses the archaeological tendency 'to assume that rigorous method will lead to the disclosure of real patterns'.⁷⁸³ The excavation method was understood as a scientific operation that established a supposedly self-enclosed system, free from human error or prejudice, through which the past could be analysed. Thomas explains: 'Throughout the twentieth century, archaeologists sought to establish abstract methodologies, which might later be brought to bear upon material evidence. Effectively, a hierarchy was in place whereby universal and decontextualised logic was valued over the particular, the historical and the tangible'.⁷⁸⁴ The grid helped eliminate the inaccuracy that could potentially result from prejudice and superstition. Thomas explains how 'error arose from the subject's personal and historical conditions, their 'subjectivity', and so part of the role of methodology was to ensure that rule of universal reason was followed. That is, in place of the particular and the contingent, reason was intended to promote objectivity'.⁷⁸⁵ At this point in the

⁷⁸¹ Wheeler, *Archaeology from the Earth*, 19

⁷⁸² *Ibid.*, 82.

⁷⁸³ Thomas, *Archaeology and Modernity*, 66.

⁷⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁷⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 63.

investigation Wheeler acted as a technician, working with a structure he merited for its ability to 'localise both control and record'.⁷⁸⁶

Wheeler's grid was seen to be nothing in itself: a non-temporal rectangle free from context and commentary that acted as the measure of all things. Utilising photography like he utilised the grid, Wheeler employed the camera as a tool for objectively recording the truth. He advised how to get the camera to take honest photographs, suggesting the use of a long focal lens to avoid distorting perspective and shading the lens from the sun to avoid halation. The camera's mediation must be made as unobtrusive as possible in order for the archaeologist to take a seemingly 'honest' photograph. Like the grid, the camera should be free of context and commentary. With this in mind, it is not surprising that photographs of the grid itself rarely appeared in Wheeler's *Maiden Castle, Dorset* (1943). When the grid did appear it almost went unnoticed, framing the edge of the photograph with an immaculate, tidy line. In *Archaeology from the Earth* (1956) Wheeler gave advice for preparing the grid to be photographed:

Clean, sharp angles between the divergent planes of a section, carefully and emphatically cut with a trowel, knife, or edging tool, are essential if the section is to tell its story with the minimum of confusion. Furthermore, a spotlessly clean trench is no mere 'eye-wash', if only because it gives the spectator a justifiable trust in the orderliness and accuracy of the work. Even the top edges of a trench should be neatly trimmed and the grass cut and swept along them; a stray blade of grass in the foreground of the picture may be overlooked by the eye but may loom embarrassingly in the lens.⁷⁸⁷

The 'spotlessly clean' trench was deployed as both a measuring tool and a symbol of the order and accuracy of Wheeler's excavation. Nash photographed Wheeler's grids and emphasised this order to the point of abstraction. He captured the structure from a low angle, which cut off the surrounding landscape to focus on the geometric intersection of

⁷⁸⁶ Wheeler, *Archaeology from the Earth*, 85.

⁷⁸⁷ Wheeler, *Archaeology from the Earth*, 200.

baulks tapering into the distance. Nash's grids have no antiquarian suggestion and their architectural appearance speaks of continental modernism rather than Iron Age Britain. These photographs suggest archaeology's inability to communicate anything but a modernist rhetoric. Christopher Chippindale admits:

The past, once past, is past. We study only the past as we are able to see it from the present. The present gives us present points of view, whether we are aware of them or not. The history of archaeology, even the history of ideas about a single site like Stonehenge, shows how closely conceptions about the distant past have followed the opinions and the spirit of each age – as well as an increasing range of empirical evidence.⁷⁸⁸

Chippindale stresses how the past is brought into the present through contemporary perspective. As Nash viewed Maiden Castle through the network of Wheeler's grids he could not have seen it as an ancient earthwork but as an emblem of modernity. The grid appeared as an underlying structure in a number of Nash's early paintings, such as *The Cherry Orchard* (1917) and *Landscape at Fulmer* (1919). Like many artists, Nash used the grid as a tool to structure his compositions and map reality onto the canvas. This utilisation of the grid allowed the painted image and the real world to converge. Traditionally, the artist painted over the grid so that when he or she were finished no trace of it remained. Like Wheeler's excavation technique, the grid's deployment in naturalistic painting had to be as unobtrusive as possible. However, *The Cherry Orchard* and *Landscape at Fulmer* are not wholly naturalistic and the grid remains visible in the rows of trees, their branches and the fencing. In these paintings, this supposedly transparent tool becomes reflective and, rather than facilitate looking, mirrors Nash's own idiosyncratic vision of order and control. The grid is most evident in Nash's paintings from the early 1930s, when he brings geometric structure into the foreground. Rosalind Krauss states that since the early part of the twentieth century the grid has 'remained emblematic of the modernist ambition', having appeared when art turned its back on nature.⁷⁸⁹ In *Mansions of the Dead* a

⁷⁸⁸ Chippindale, 'Introduction', 7.

⁷⁸⁹ Krauss, 'Grids', 50.

series of grids are suspended before a cloudy sky and it may seem like Nash had turned his back on the real world to transport the viewer onto a more abstract, lofty plane. However, Townsend notes that the grids in *Mansions of the Dead* look like ‘the pre-formed elements of modern apartment buildings being swung into place from some enormous crane. As lodging for the soul, these structures might have been designed by Le Corbusier’.⁷⁹⁰ Following Townsend’s observation, I argue that Nash did not take flight from the terrestrial plane but landed his work within the modern city. The grid in *Mansions of the Dead* was not used for the purpose of modernist practice but as a symbol of modernity. Even in Nash’s most abstract period, his grids never announced a ‘will to silence ... hostility to literature, to narrative, to discourse’.⁷⁹¹ Within Nash’s paintings the grid always told a story. I argue that the same was true of Wheeler’s grids, which were not neutral but were another form of advertising that promoted the rigour and reliability of archaeology. As a symbol of order and control, the grid distanced archaeology from the irrationality associated with its antiquarian predecessor. As Krauss states, the grid’s modern aesthetic left ‘no place of refuge, no room on the face of it, for vestiges of the nineteenth century to hide’.⁷⁹² In part, Wheeler’s grid was an advert for archaeological accuracy and therefore was not neutral, but upheld an ideology.

Nash, Mondrian and Sorrell

Although Nash’s photographs of Maiden Castle demonstrated his interest in Wheeler’s grid system, the grid appeared less frequently in his paintings from 1935 onwards. During this year Nash admitted that abstraction could only be an occasional means of expression for him.⁷⁹³ He did not fully explain why he was unable to submit to a completely non-representational idiom but suggested he found it limited because of the

⁷⁹⁰ Townsend, ‘We are Making a New World’: Death, Modernity and Order in Paul Nash’, forthcoming 2015.

⁷⁹¹ Krauss, ‘Grids’, 50.

⁷⁹² Ibid., 54.

⁷⁹³ Nash, *For, But Not With*, 110.

deeply imposed order and discipline it put upon the imagination.⁷⁹⁴ Once the zenith of perfection had been reached, say with the utilisation of the grid, there were little places left for abstraction to go. Accordingly, Krauss describes the grid as anti-developmental.⁷⁹⁵ The grid could also be seen as a moment of termination within archaeology and Wheeler even admitted that ‘at the best, excavation is destruction’.⁷⁹⁶ In Wheeler’s case, the archaeological process consisted of a series of grids: excavation grid, results table and museum cabinet. These boxes abstracted artefacts from the lively world of associations and catalogued them via the rudiments of their material identity. I compare Wheeler to Piet Mondrian, who is probably the most famous twentieth-century painter of the grid. Mondrian reduced his paintings to elementary compositions of straight lines and primary colours. He believed there were two kinds of reality, one exhibiting individual appearance and the other universal appearance. Mondrian saw the grid as free of individual sentiment and therefore as a material platform from which a clearer form of consciousness could be reached. In 1937 he wrote that both art and science were evolving from a focus on the ‘subjective towards the objective; towards the essence of things’.⁷⁹⁷ In search of the universal, Mondrian imposed discipline on his imagination and transformed himself into a technician. He referred to himself as a neutral recorder of truth and echoed Wheeler’s ideology when he claimed that

the progress of science, of technique, of machinery, of life as a whole, has only made him [the non-figurative artist] into a living machine, capable of realising in a pure manner the essence of art. In this way he is in his creation sufficiently neutral, that nothing of himself or outside of him can prevent him from establishing that which is universal.⁷⁹⁸

This essay was published in the British art journal *Circle: International Survey of Constructive Art* (1937), which was started in 1935 and originally intended as an annual but produced

⁷⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁹⁵ Krauss, ‘Grids’, 64.

⁷⁹⁶ Wheeler, *Archaeology from the Earth*, 15.

⁷⁹⁷ Mondrian, ‘Plastic Art and Pure Plastic Art’, 43.

⁷⁹⁸ Ibid., 55.

only one publication in 1937. Its British contributors included Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth and Ben Nicholson. Nash remained notably absent from this group, with whom he was usually associated. It is possible that Nash could no longer be aligned with ‘technicians’ like Mondrian after he expressed his inability to fully submit to abstraction.⁷⁹⁹ However, Nash would not have appeared wholly out of place in *Circle* as his interest in the formal composition of prehistoric structures accorded with the photographs that accompanied Hepworth’s essay for the journal. These were a series of Stonehenge photographs, one by Walter Gropius and the other two by the German writer Carola Giedion-Welcker.⁸⁰⁰ Hepworth explained that thousands of years ago these standing stones played a fundamental role in religious ceremony and represented the deepest emotional aspects of life. She stated that properties of volume, mass and the laws of gravity were the very vitalisation of our experience.⁸⁰¹ Hepworth argued that we have inherited this sculptural understanding from our prehistoric ancestors, only now it constitutes the very essence of experience and for the most part goes unnoticed. Modern man has long neglected the sculptural world and his ‘form consciousness’ has become atrophied.⁸⁰² Hepworth claimed that ‘a world without form consciousness would scarcely be alive at all. The consciousness and understanding of volume and mass, laws of gravity, contour of earth under our feet ... these are surely the very essence of life, the principles and laws which are the vitalisation of our experience’.⁸⁰³ In another essay for *Circle*, Naum Gabo insisted that lines, colours and shapes were ‘self-conditioned psychological phenomena rooted in human nature ... and [were] organically bound up with human emotions’.⁸⁰⁴ While Nash might have agreed with Hepworth and Gabo’s ideas in 1932, by

⁷⁹⁹ Nash writes: ‘the hard cold stone, the rasping grass, the intricate architecture of trees and waves, or the brittle sculpture of a dead leaf – I cannot translate altogether beyond their own image without suffering in spirit’. Nash, ‘For, But Not With’, 112.

⁸⁰⁰ Harris, *Romantic Moderns*, 211.

⁸⁰¹ Hepworth, ‘Sculpture’, 114.

⁸⁰² *Ibid.*, 115.

⁸⁰³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰⁴ Gabo, ‘The Constructive Idea in Art’, 7.

1935 he suggested that focus on pure form was a means of suppressing life.⁸⁰⁵ Nash's idea related to Kenneth Clark's *The Future of Painting* (1935), which stated that 'abstract art, in anything like pure form, has the fatal defect of purity. Without a pinch of earth the artist soon contracts spiritual beri-beri and dies of exhaustion [...]. Forms which the human mind can invent, it can also exhaust'.⁸⁰⁶ I argue that *Maiden Castle* contains the 'pinch of earth' that Clark describes and counters the purity of Wheeler's grid.⁸⁰⁷ The watercolour presents a grey and pink sky of orderly, horizontal brushstrokes, which contrasts the earthwork's crisscross pattern. The earthwork's jumble of lines generates a stormy, wavelike motion. Causey suggests that 'the tempo of the banks and ditches has been speeded up, as if he [Nash] wanted to get a stronger feeling of the ascents and declivities of the tracks and perhaps for the landscape's potential for movement'.⁸⁰⁸ In contrast to *Maiden Castle*, Wheeler diminished the sense of life at the earthwork by reading its prehistoric inhabitants through their material technologies and thereby reducing the past to static objects. For Wheeler, ceramic types commonly defined Neolithic culture. Most of the pottery from Maiden Castle belongs to the ceramic type called 'Hembury Ware', which are bowls with tubular handles and expanded trumpet-like ends called trumpet-lugs. In Britain this handle occurs at Hembury, Carn Brea and at Maiden Castle. At Maiden Castle the bowls are characterised by an unperforated trumpet-lug, consisting of a solid, dumb-bell shaped projection. The solid trumpet-lug did not appear at Hembury until well into the Early Bronze Age, whereas at Maiden Castle it is present from the start. With this evidence, Wheeler claimed that 'one is forced then to regard the foundation of the Neolithic Maiden Castle as the product of a slightly more evolved stage of the culture, and so probably later in its inception than the beginnings of Hembury'.⁸⁰⁹ Wheeler utilised the chronological and regional distribution of artefacts as a way of understanding past cultures. This method presented an unbridgeable gulf between the

⁸⁰⁵ Worringer quoted in Nash, 'For, But Not With', 112.

⁸⁰⁶ Clark, 'The Future of Painting', 544.

⁸⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁸ Causey, *Paul Nash: Landscape and the Life of Objects*, 119.

⁸⁰⁹ Wheeler, *Maiden Castle: Dorset*, 139.

unquantifiable life of ancient people and the static objects that Wheeler used to define them. For Wheeler, prehistoric culture was to be approached like an enemy in warfare, as an object to be captured. He described the archaeologist as a soldier ‘fighting against a fellow being with different but discoverable idiosyncrasies which must be understood and allowed for in every reaction and manoeuvre’.⁸¹⁰ Wheeler sought to discover, and thereby negate, the idiosyncrasies of past peoples. Wheeler, like Mondrian, looked to overrule the subjective, which he saw as an obstruction to truth.

Despite his scientific outlook, subjectivity crept into Wheeler’s archaeological practice. While the grid system attempted to abstract from life, Wheeler’s written reports often embellished it through his dramatisation of warfare. Wheeler had fought in the First World War and military life had made a deep impression on his archaeological practice. Wheeler’s excavations often focused on prehistoric sites famed for conflict. Accordingly, almost all his excavations at Maiden Castle were carried out on its defences. Wheeler’s personal fascination with war often caused him to overemphasise the amount of conflict at a site. Even to ascribe the term ‘hill fort’ to Maiden Castle was to exaggerate its military history, since much of its six thousand year existence was spent as a farming settlement. Wheeler focused on the Roman invasion at Maiden Castle in AD43 and his description of the conflict contained numerous assumptions that were unsupported by conclusive evidence:

In the innermost bay of the entrance, close outside the actual gates, a number of huts had recently been built; these were now set alight, and under the rising clouds of smoke the gates were stormed and the position carried. But resistance had been obstinate and the fury of the attackers was roused. For a space, confusion and massacre dominated the scene.⁸¹¹

Wheeler interpreted the burning of the huts from a thick layer of charcoal found beside the dwellings. In the 1980s Niall Sharples stated that the charcoal was most likely

⁸¹⁰ Wheeler, *Archaeology from the Earth*, 17.

⁸¹¹ Wheeler, *Maiden Castle: Dorset*, 62.

evidence of iron working on the site, not of wartime attack.⁸¹² In another emotive description, Wheeler described how human remains were thrown haphazardly into pits in the urgency of war.⁸¹³ Again Sharples contested this claim, stating that the position of the skeletons indicated that the bodies were placed carefully into the pits.⁸¹⁴ Furthermore, this was an already established cemetery, suggesting that the bodies were brought from the surrounding area to be buried there deliberately. Wheeler's excavation reports were often sensational and expressed his fascination with war. They exposed excavation as a psychological as well as a scientific event and suggested the difficulty of separating investigation from the idiosyncratic interpretations of the perceiving subject.

In 1937 Wheeler commissioned the artist and archaeological illustrator Alan Sorrell to draw a reconstruction of the Roman invasion at Maiden Castle (fig. 56). Sorrell depicted an aerial view of the hill fort's deep ramparts. Large plumes of smoke rise from the entrance, where Roman soldiers march in an orderly fashion into the earthwork. Maiden Castle's inhabitants are scattered about their dwellings in a vain attempt to defend their homes. Sorrell's illustration appeared in *The Illustrated London News* in 1937 and was accompanied by this text: 'How Vespasian's legionaries fought their way through the eastern entrance of the Celtic town of Maiden Castle, on a Dorset Hilltop, Nineteen hundred years ago: A drawing based on the highly informative results of the excavations recently carried out there by Dr. Mortimer Wheeler'.⁸¹⁵ The newspaper declared that Wheeler's excavations validated Sorrell's emotive illustration. Early archaeological practice employed the artist to record the topography and artefacts of ancient sites. In the early twentieth century photography usurped this role and the artist was primarily employed to reconstruct past events. In twentieth-century Britain this specialism was most famously associated with Sorrell, who started work as an archaeological artist in the

⁸¹² Sharples, *Maiden Castle*, 124.

⁸¹³ Wheeler, *Maiden Castle: Dorset*, 62.

⁸¹⁴ Sharples, *Maiden Castle*, 124.

⁸¹⁵ 'The Roman Invasion of Dorset: Vespasian takes Maiden Castle', *The Illustrated London News*, December 4, 1937.

middle of the 1930s. Mark Sorrell describes the factual aspect of his father's reconstructions:

The buildings which rose up from ground plans in meticulously researched detail were made to work as structures. Materials were as correct as their evidence would allow, the rooflines were carefully considered and all the stresses and strains of real structures were taken into account. A Sorrell building not only looked as though it could stand, one could confidently believe that it had stood!⁸¹⁶

Despite Alan Sorrell's supposed ability to depict the 'reality' of the past, he considered himself an artist rather than an archaeologist and claimed that the creative element of his work was always clearly present. He discussed the importance of the imagination in his archaeological reconstructions:

I once heard Kenneth Clark describe some paintings and drawings as 'visual records pickled in style'. It is a curious phrase, but was clearly intended to mean that factual recording is only convincing when it is seen through a personality. Obviously, the more potent the personality, the more vivid will be the resulting painting or drawing: we have only to look at a really good work to recognise that.⁸¹⁷

The documentary aspect of Sorrell's illustrations accorded with Wheeler's meticulous research, while the imaginative aspect complemented the written reports that were fuelled by fantasies of war. Sorrell's illustrations and Wheeler's reports preyed upon the growing anxieties of war in the late 1930s. In 1937 the newspaper's description of the Roman invasion of Maiden Castle must have resonated with current fears regarding the invasion of Britain, as the Spanish Civil War raged and fascism was spreading throughout Europe. *The Illustrated London News* wrote: 'It is probably that Maiden Castle was one of the twenty cities which the future Emperor Vespasia, as commander of the Second Legion, is recorded to have captured during his march through southern England at that time'.⁸¹⁸

⁸¹⁶ Sorrell, 'Introduction', 7.

⁸¹⁷ Sorrell, 'The Artist and Reconstruction', 20.

⁸¹⁸ 'The Roman Invasion of Dorset: Vespasian takes Maiden Castle', *The Illustrated London News*, December 4, 1937.

Through the image of conflict, Wheeler's article connected interwar Britain with its Neolithic past. This promoted the notion that human experience spanned millennia and thereby generated a public interest in the archaeological subject.

Nash's *Maiden Castle* did little to connect contemporary society with the ancients. The absence of obvious human figures meant that prehistoric peoples remained evasive and could not be annexed into a vision of modern society. Unlike Sorrell, Nash did not envision the past but subtly suggested its continuing presence through the earthwork's contours. This achronic approach to prehistory countered the linear timeline that Wheeler constructed for *Maiden Castle: Dorset*, which presented a three-age system that divided the Iron Age into these distinct periods:

Iron Age A: 300BC - 56BC

Iron Age B: 56BC - AD25

Iron Age C (increasing admixture of Roman after AD43) AD25 - AD70

The three-age system was based on the material development of cultures. Wheeler established the arrival of Iron Age B through additions made to the earthwork's defence system. Primary focus was given to the development of a new scientific weapon, the sling-stone. The report explained how the invasion of Iron Age B relieved Maiden Castle from the squalid peasantry of Iron Age A, which was conservative in its material development and scornfully described by Wheeler as 'a dry tinder to any spark that fell on it'.⁸¹⁹ The slow material development of Iron Age A made dating its occupation at Maiden Castle difficult. Wheeler bitterly commented that 'it is perhaps a consolation that the detailed chronology of so unenterprising and self-centred a culture is not a primary moment in the history of man'.⁸²⁰ Sharples mentions nothing of the invasion of Iron Age B and its introduction of the sling-stone. The invasion hypothesis was popular during the

⁸¹⁹ Wheeler, *Maiden Castle: Dorset*, 31.

⁸²⁰ Ibid.

1930s but has since suffered criticism because of the static model it assumes for societies, which are seen to only significantly develop with the invasion of a new material culture. Sharples avoids Wheeler's invasion hypothesis because it does not consider change caused by a less easily quantifiable social dynamism. As a culture-historic archaeologist, Wheeler determined humankind's progress through the chronology of its material advancements. At one end of this chronology stood the archaeologist, whose advanced position allowed him a rigorous examination of the ancients standing at the other end. Wheeler even noted chronological progression within the short history of archaeology and asked the readers of *Archaeology from the Earth* to forgive his untutored forebears for their excavation mistakes. He claimed that to blame them would be as futile as blaming 'Napoleon for attacking the British squares with cavalry instead of machine-guns'.⁸²¹ John Cowper Powys' novel *Maiden Castle* (1936), which was published while excavations were being carried out at the site, criticised the chronological progression that Wheeler proposed. The character Uryen Quirm claims that archaeology cannot examine the ancients because the past is yet to die and become a static object of study. He argues:

when you talk of science you must remember that these things are like dark-finned fish buried in ice. *They have life in them that can be revived.* And I must say this to you ... it is *not* science that can revive them. But go on with your excavations ... But you must remember when you're dealing with *that* place you're vivisectioning something different from a dog! But it doesn't matter. It's only a few hundred years against twenty thousand. It doesn't matter. Besides, the secret escapes you! What you and your kind call Evolution I call Creation: and it would do no harm to remind you that those who create also destroy!⁸²²

Nash, like Uryen, seemed to denounce the archaeologist's notion of unilinear evolution in favour of a temporal jumble. While Wheeler's three-age system compartmentalised the past, Nash swept his viewers up in its undulations and prohibited a clear, chronological

⁸²¹ Wheeler, *Archaeology from the Earth*, 15.

⁸²² Cowper Powys, *Maiden Castle*, 167.

perspective. Myfanwy Evans fittingly described Nash's achronic treatment of time in an essay published in *Axis* in the winter of 1937:

He paints three-thousand years without turning a hair, and time is no longer that irritating thing that divides our morning coffee from our afternoon tea, discards this patina as a mere twentieth-century pretender to a rich, ripe, age in years, admires that as a genuine seventeenth-fiftier and puts everything in its place. The motorcar after the cart after the horse. It is no longer a measure beginning from yesterday, or preferably the day before, and going backwards through the centuries, but an indefinable sense of scarcely shifting permanence, that includes then, now and sometime after.

In no way does Paul Nash limit time, or try to reconstruct the past, when, for instance, he paints Maiden Castle or Ballard Down. He has no interest in the past as *past*, but the accumulated intenseness of the past as *present* is his special concern and joy. The contour of things past is given the aura of things present, so the reality *and* the romanticism of both is intensified.⁸²³

Nash did not transport the viewer back in time but painted ancient landscapes as he felt them to be in a moment of experience. The past remained present because it impressed upon the psyche of the perceiving subject. Discussing the relationship between art and archaeology, Sam Smiles states that Nash offered a 'resolutely artistic approach to antiquity'.⁸²⁴ Smiles describes how paintings like *Equivalents for the Megaliths* disregarded geographical and archaeological facts to produce a picture of Avebury that was based upon an emotional, rather than a scientific, understanding.⁸²⁵ This emotional engagement with prehistory mirrors Wheeler's written reports for Maiden Castle, which were formulated around his military background and interwar situation. Smiles suggests that as *Equivalents for the Megaliths* formulated Avebury around a modernist situation, Nash laid 'bare the creative and imaginative project which lies at the heart of archaeology'.⁸²⁶ *Maiden*

⁸²³ Evans, 'Paul Nash', 12.

⁸²⁴ Smiles, 'Thomas Guest and Paul Nash in Wiltshire: Two Episodes in the Artistic Approach to British Antiquity', 10.

⁸²⁵ Ibid.

⁸²⁶ Ibid., 14.

Castle testifies to the mute potency of the past. Unlike Sorrell, Nash had no intention of communicating the facts of the hill fort and his 1937 watercolour left out people, tools and housing that might expound knowledge. *Maiden Castle* communicates nothing but the mysterious animism of the ancients. Smiles notes: 'Rather than the object being disciplined or made rational through archaeological research, Nash found a means of highlighting the object's ill-disciplined potential to disturb our rationality'.⁸²⁷ The significance of *Maiden Castle* is yet to be defined. The hill fort's undulations appear to be moving, making it seem like the structure still has to fall into place. The dynamism of Nash's landscape remains empty of the concrete 'facts' that weigh down Sorrell's illustration. *Maiden Castle* comments on archaeology's failure to communicate antiquity 'through the couched language of academia' and instead employs landscape painting to convey the continuing life of the long-distant past.⁸²⁸ As Evans suggests, Nash did not wish to fix everything in its place and offer a narrative that gradually progressed into the 'civilised' present.⁸²⁹ In a manner that recalled Agar, Nash refused chronological progression to focus on Maiden Castle's continuing life, which Wheeler's three-age system impeded.

Surrealism

Nash's approach to Dorset chimed with Bataille's celebration of the uncivilised, however his focus on regeneration maintained an Agarian sense of fertility that overrode the philosopher's love of what was 'vilest, most discouraging, and most corrupted'.⁸³⁰ Nash followed in Bataille's footsteps as he uncovered some of Dorset's monstrous aspects. However, these creatures did not plague the county with disease but endowed it with a sense of rebirth. Nash described his ability to revive the landscape:

Gradually, however, the landscape, as a scene, ceased to be absorbing.
Some drama of beings, after all seemed to be necessary. A few attempts to

⁸²⁷ Ibid., 13.

⁸²⁸ Tilley, 'Digging with the Pen: Novel Archaeologies and Literary Traditions', 417.

⁸²⁹ Evans, 'Paul Nash', 12.

⁸³⁰ Breton, 'Second Manifesto of Surrealism', 181.

escape into the refuge of abstract design proved to me unsuited. But at this point I began to discover the significance of the so-called inanimate object. Henceforth Nature became endowed for me with a new life. The landscape, too, seemed now possessed of a different animation. To contemplate the personal beauty of stone and leaf, bark and shell, and to exalt them to the principles of imaginary happenings, became a new interest. To imagine instead of to interpret.⁸³¹

Nash elaborated on the generative power of the surrealist imagination as he stated that by finding the object you create it and 'it has always been yours, living, as I understand, in the unconscious until the accident of your perception gives it birth'.⁸³² Nash illustrated his surrealist imagination in *The Nest of the Wild Stones* (1937, fig. 57), which, alongside *Encounter in the Afternoon* (1936, fig. 58), revived the landscape at Maiden Castle.⁸³³ *Encounter in the Afternoon* presents a slate-grey, gridded floor that fades out into a background of brown hills dotted with white mounds, which look like standing stones. At the centre of the composition is an upright stone, while another stone lays beside it prone. These objects also look like the bleached bones of birds, with big bodies, longish necks and small heads. The grid in *Encounter in the Afternoon* connects the painting with Wheeler's excavations at Maiden Castle, which Nash was aware of and had photographed. This suggests a connection between the painting and the stones that Nash claimed to have discovered at the hill fort:

The summer excavations at Maiden Castle had disclosed many skeletons of the defenders of the hill fortress buried where they fell in their last fight against the Roman armies. So much, at least, I gathered from one of the party of diggers. I was not particularly interested in the archaeological significance of the discovery. But the scene in its dramatic elements had, indeed, an awful beauty. The sun beat down on the glinting white bones which were disposed in elegant clusters and sprays of blanched sprigs and branches. Or some seemed to be the nests of giant birds; the gleaming skulls like clutches of monstrous eggs. It was a place, with these scattered

⁸³¹ Typed Document 'Foreword to the Paul Nash Exhibition at the Redfern Gallery, n.d., TGA 769/1/61, Paul Nash Collection, Tate Archive, London.

⁸³² Nash, 'The Life of the Inanimate Object', 139.

⁸³³ Ibid.

groups of fantastic nests and long raised ledges on the open hills,
resembling a bird sanctuary. A sanctuary for moas.⁸³⁴

The moa is an extinct bird that had a fat body and a long neck resembling the shape of the 'stones' in *Encounter in the Afternoon*. Nash transformed the human remains at Maiden Castle into obscure creatures and countered Wheeler's popularisation of the skeletons, which were left open at Maiden Castle to attract tourists. One particular attraction was the skeleton with the ballista bolt in its spine. Clark recalls:

The most moving single relic of the struggle which was unearthed was undoubtedly one particular skeleton. It was the skeleton of a British defender, and between the disc and his spine, mute and unmistakable evidence after more than eighteen hundred years, there still lay the Roman arrowhead that had pierced the body and ended his life as he stood on the defences, shouting defiance as the legionaries pressed relentlessly uphill beneath the covering barrage.⁸³⁵

This human-interest story offered a point of contact for people attempting to engage with prehistory. Nash's painting and text destroyed this contact by presenting ancient man as an obscure bird-skeleton. In the surrealist manner, Nash re-imagined the familiar and made it alien. The grid accentuated this alienation by positioning the stones within a structure that symbolised knowledge and control. Nash was the only person who could identify the objects in *Encounter in the Afternoon* because they were objects of his own imagination. This idiosyncrasy destroyed the supposed objectivity of Wheeler's grid method. Rebellion against archaeological excavation is demonstrated by the poised stance of the left stone, which looks like it is about to move out of the caged confinement of the grid. Further suggestion that *Encounter in the Afternoon* is connected to the moas at Maiden Castle is the painting's similarity to *The Nest of the Wild Stones*. Both show two stones at the centre of the composition, with one stone lying prone and the other standing upright beside it. Nash described the standing stone in *The Nest of the Wild Stones* as a 'thing

⁸³⁴ Nash, 'Unseen Landscapes', 145-6.

⁸³⁵ Clark, *Sir Mortimer Wheeler*, 71.

choking with song that dared not fly but seemed to strain upwards always'.⁸³⁶ This is precisely the position of the left stone in *Encounter in the Afternoon*. The association between the paintings is supported by Nash's description of the prototype for *The Nest of the Wild Stones*, which had a gridded floor just like *Encounter in the Afternoon*. Nash claimed that the floor in the prototype 'looked like a sheet of squared paper with a torn edge, stretched across a barren field'.⁸³⁷ Nash described the stones in *The Nest of the Wild Stones*:

If stones are eggs they birds are, too. Not even grosbeaks always, or comic birds like toucans, but partridges and landrails much more, and little pretty quails. Larks, even. All birds of the furrow and the down. Sculptors knock birds out of stones. By the time they have done with them they are neither birds nor stones. Except Brancusi's. But the stone birds of the field are always both. They do not insist. Perhaps, when they are lying on the ground they are stones, and when they stand up they are birds, but, thank God, they never look like stone birds.⁸³⁸

According to Nash, *The Nest of the Wild Stones* shows one prone stone and one standing bird, highlighting the double aspect of the object. At a conscious level stones are just stones, however, just below the level of consciousness they gather life, are raised to their feet and become birds. Through this double aspect Nash maintained a connection to both external reality and internal perception, whilst clearly favouring the latter. As previously stated, the 'stone-bird', which looked like it was about to fly away from Wheeler's grid in *Encounter in the Afternoon*, demonstrated Nash's preference for the subjective and suggested his interest in using surrealism to strengthen his critique of the rational, science-based discipline of archaeology.

As Nash set himself up against archaeological objectivity he revealed a tendency to recoil into fantasy and hinted at a potential rift with Breton, whose aim for surrealism was 'to present interior reality and exterior reality as two elements in a process of

⁸³⁶ Nash, 'The Nest of the Wild Stones', 143.

⁸³⁷ Ibid.

⁸³⁸ Ibid., 142.

unification, of finally becoming *one*'.⁸³⁹ As previously stated, Breton wanted surrealism to merge consciousness and unconsciousness in order to expand psychic reality and liberate the mind. By the 1930s he believed that this would be achieved through proletarian revolution, which would liberate humankind.⁸⁴⁰ Breton, Hugh Sykes Davies and Herbert Read promoted the political aspects of surrealism to the British public in the book *Surrealism* (1936). Although the publication included *Encounter in the Afternoon*, I claim that Nash's interpretation of surrealism did not embrace the political and was far more concerned with promoting a romantically surreal form of myth making. I argue this point by detailing Nash's selective reading of Sykes Davies' essay for *Surrealism*, which he quotes in an article called 'The Life of the Inanimate Object' (1937):

Wordsworth built up a mythology which has been of the very greatest importance in English culture. In its general outline it conforms with the fundamental mythologies of the human race; it is a systematic animation of the inanimate, a mass of verbal formulae (metaphors etc.) which attribute life and feeling onto non-human nature.⁸⁴¹

Wordsworth used his imagination to animate the inanimate and, according to Sykes Davies, this is where 'we find true knowledge, the coincidence of man and the world'.⁸⁴² Nash's article emphasised how the 'idea of giving life to inanimate objects is as old as almost any record of fable'.⁸⁴³ This echoed Sykes Davies' comparison of Wordsworth's poetry to primitive mythology. Sykes Davies explained that the ancients attributed human life onto nature as a means of control.⁸⁴⁴ Thunder was often personified as the enraged father and, while an angry patriarch is terrifying, his temper can be appeased by a child's good behaviour. Accordingly, the appropriate rites and observances of a society had, in a mythological mindset, the potential to alleviate a thunderstorm.⁸⁴⁵ Sykes Davies asked

⁸³⁹ Breton, 'What is Surrealism?', 116.

⁸⁴⁰ Ibid., 115.

⁸⁴¹ Sykes Davies, 'Surrealism at this Time and Place', 143.

⁸⁴² Ibid., 147.

⁸⁴³ Nash, 'The Life of the Inanimate Object', 137.

⁸⁴⁴ Sykes Davies, 'Surrealism at this Time and Place', 150.

⁸⁴⁵ Ibid.

why, in an era when nature is so ably controlled by technological innovation, is there a return to myth in Romantic poetry? This question remained absent from Nash's text, which merely stressed that the tendency for myth making had been alive in Britain since time immemorial and continued in contemporary life with the movement known as surrealism. In contrast, Sykes Davies distinguished between ancient forms of myth making and surrealism by specifying the Romantic era as the historical period out of which the modern movement had evolved: 'It seems a reasonable supposition, then, that towards the end of the eighteenth century humanity was faced by a peculiarly severe crisis of feeling from which it has not yet escaped'.⁸⁴⁶ According to Sykes Davies, this crisis was a need for proletariat revolution. Sykes Davies suggested the political incompetence of the Romantics by describing them as notoriously inchoate, disorderly and intuitive.⁸⁴⁷ Contrastingly, he described contemporary surrealism as 'organised, orderly and conscious'.⁸⁴⁸ He explained that this 'order is exhibited in its theory, owing its greatest debt to dialectical materialism, and something more to psychoanalysis; it is also exhibited in cohesion on the social and political plane, and in the personal co-operation of all artists, using whatever medium, in all their activities and on an international scale for the sake of real humanity'.⁸⁴⁹ I argue that Nash's surrealism lacked this political thrust and was better suited to Sykes Davies' description of the disorderly Romantics.⁸⁵⁰ This was a common perception of the British surrealists in the 1930s. Lambirth explains:

The attempt to propagate an English branch of Surrealism was only partly successful. The main obstacles were native individualism and lack of commitment to political issues. Despite various new alignments and calls for homogeneity, such joint activity as there was tended to be in the nature of social gatherings; the political and revolutionary aspects of French Surrealism were almost entirely lacking. Furthermore the artistic spirit of Surrealism was not dramatically unfamiliar to a culture which already boasted Blake, Carroll and Lear; it is no doubt for this reason that

⁸⁴⁶ Ibid., 164.

⁸⁴⁷ Ibid., 168.

⁸⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁵⁰ Ibid., 168.

Surrealist techniques ... were easily assimilated by individual English artists whose own practice was thereby enriched but not revolutionised.⁸⁵¹

Although Sykes Davies focused on Coleridge and Wordsworth, his critique of Romantic poetry moved his notion of surrealism away from Britain's literary tradition. Sykes Davies was also keen to emphasise the importance of the Romantic poets' international, political concerns as he described Wordsworth's enthusiasm for the French revolution and Byron's liberation of the Greeks.⁸⁵² The revolutionary aspect of surrealism required that all boundaries, including national ones, be crossed and thereby destroyed. The movement's anti-nationalism had been established by Breton in his 'Manifesto of Surrealism' (1924), which called for surrealists to 'make the bitterest enemies partake of a secret desire which will blow up the countries'.⁸⁵³ Nash largely ignored the politically charged aspects of surrealism to promote the movement as a 'reaffirmation of the romantic principle'.⁸⁵⁴ Nash claimed:

Surrealism, in almost every form, is a native of Britain. Let us remember that if the inspiration of Surrealism is the dream the expression is poetry: poetry in its widest exercise and appeal; poetry not only of the written word but in the spring of thought and behaviour. The genius of Shakespeare, the vision of Blake, the imagination of Coleridge, the inspiration of Carroll and Edward Lear, all belong to Surrealism.⁸⁵⁵

Nash's selective interpretation of *Surrealism* illustrated how his perception of the movement was centred on a romantic form of myth making. Humphrey Jennings suggested the ease of such an interpretation as he lamented the lack of revolutionary force in *Surrealism* and claimed that it could not compare with 'the passion, terror and excitement, dictated by absolute integrity and produced with all the poetry of bare

⁸⁵¹ Lambirth, 'Introduction', 4.

⁸⁵² Davies, 'Surrealism at the Time and Place', 165.

⁸⁵³ Breton, 'Manifesto of Surrealism', 31.

⁸⁵⁴ Read, 'Introduction', 28.

⁸⁵⁵ Nash, 'Surrealism and the Illustrated Book', 131.

necessity, which emanated from *La Révolution Surréaliste*.⁸⁵⁶ Jennings criticised *Surrealism's* intention to fit the movement neatly within the British tradition and look 'for ghosts only on battlements, and on battlements only for ghosts'.⁸⁵⁷ Jennings promoted an anthropological form of surrealism that made modern myths the object of observation in order to dispel their power over a still highly suspicious society.⁸⁵⁸ In contrast, as the 1930s progressed Nash became increasingly interested in a romantic notion of surrealism that had a tendency for myth making.

'Swanage Or Seaside Surrealism'

Nash's romantic and non-radical version of surrealism was epitomised by a competition held in *The Architectural Review* in 1936 asking readers to photograph surrealist aspects of their British holiday destinations. The journal hoped that the pursuit of such examples would 'be found to be in itself an amusing and instructive holiday pastime'.⁸⁵⁹ While surrealists on the continent intended to prove themselves fully capable of 'doing their duties as revolutionaries', British surrealists showed their affiliation to the movement through the leisure activity of taking holiday snapshots.⁸⁶⁰ Remy states that although 'the competition evidenced the *presence* of surrealism *there and then*, the tendency to equate surrealism with a series of photographic recipes and devices inevitably blurred the radical questioning of reality at work in the surrealist vision'.⁸⁶¹ First prize went to Luke Summers, who submitted four photographs of Blackgang Chine on the Isle of White. One of the photographs captured a whale skeleton on display in an amusement park. Summers showed his wife standing beside the skeleton, which had been mounted on wooden posts. Summers found surrealism in a location already marketed as a

⁸⁵⁶ Jennings, 'Surrealism', 219.

⁸⁵⁷ Ibid., 220.

⁸⁵⁸ Jennings was the co-founder of the anthropological movement Mass Observation, which began in 1937 and looked to examine the gap between public opinion and what was presented as public opinion in the press.

⁸⁵⁹ Anon, 'The Architectural Review Competition', 42.

⁸⁶⁰ Breton, 'André Breton (1896-1966) from the Second Manifesto of Surrealism', 447.

⁸⁶¹ Remy, 'Surrealism's Vertiginous Descent on Britain', 29.

curiosity. In a manner that summed up the entire competition, he reaffirmed, rather than disrupted, existing perceptions of the world. This docile form of surrealism was explicitly inspired by Nash's article 'Swanage Or Seaside Surrealism', which, claims Harris, made the movement 'look less like an import than a home-grown phenomenon, native to any English antique shop'.⁸⁶² The text took Max Ernst's collage novel *La Femme 100 Têtes* and combined it with William Hardy's topographical guidebook *Old Swanage, or Purbeck Past and Present* (1908). Nash began with a brief chronological account of the town's history, starting with prehistoric crocodiles and ending with the quarrying of Portland stone. This chronology was then compromised in the Victorian era, when 'Swanage began to develop the slightly fantastic element which today gives it such a strange individuality'.⁸⁶³ Nash described how the nineteenth-century stone contractors, John Mowlem and George Burt, salvaged pieces of architecture from the capital and re-erected them in their hometown of Swanage. One piece that really caught Nash's attention was the monument to Alfred the Great (fig. 59), which was surmounted by a pyramid of cannonballs despite commemorating a battle that took place five hundred years before the invention of gunpowder. Other strange additions to the town were the old cast-iron lamps and bollards that still bore names like 'City of London' and 'St Martin's'. Nash's postscript praised Mowlem and Burt: 'When at some future date the history of Swanage comes to be written, possibly at a time when the fair promise of the present for progress and prosperity has been fulfilled beyond the most sanguine expectations, two names will stand out ... John Mowlem and George Burt'.⁸⁶⁴ Nash took his postscript from *Old Swanage*. The quote did not specify why Mowlem and Burt should be praised and therefore Hardy's statement, which praised the stone contractors for the order they brought to the town, could be twisted to fit into Nash's celebration of Swanage's 'surrealist' disorder. Nash mutated Hardy's message and instead congratulated the men for the surrealism that they unintentionally created. In the manner of a collage artist,

⁸⁶² Harris, *Romantic Moderns*, 92.

⁸⁶³ Nash, *Swanage Or Seaside Surrealism*, 127.

⁸⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 128.

Nash presented Hardy's statement out of context and changed its meaning. As will be shown, this was precisely the procedure that Mowlem and Burt unconsciously implemented at Swanage. In 'Swanage Or Seaside Surrealism' Nash, Mowlem, Burt and Ernst displaced the meaning that Hardy attempted to solidify. *Old Swanage* is divided into numerous short articles, each one describing an aspect of the town's history. Hardy commented that 'if my humble book, with its many illustrations, is the means of preserving an impression of the old town and its history, the old folk and their doings and sayings, I shall feel the pains that I have taken in its compilation ... have not been in vain'.⁸⁶⁵ In Hardy's words, the book carried the reader backwards 'on the swift-winged chariot of time over a thousand years' to view Swanage as it then probably presented itself.⁸⁶⁶ Hardy made it easy to imagine the bygone town. He orientated the reader with modern landmarks, such as the Grosvenor Hotel, upon which he resurrected monuments that had long disappeared. This retroactive process demonstrated the author's nostalgia for past times.⁸⁶⁷ Hardy expressed conservatism as he sardonically described the disappearance of the old Purbeck stone houses as being '*improved* away [my italics]' by new developments.⁸⁶⁸ *Old Swanage* presented Hardy's desire to record 'authentic' parts of England before they became lost forever to modernisation.

The difference between Hardy and Nash is clearly illustrated in Hardy's chapter on Mowlem and Burt. Hardy noted that Mowlem paved and curbed the paths of nearly all the roads in Swanage and built a museum, reading room and library in the town. He praised Burt for bringing Swanage the railway, which helped make the town a popular holiday resort. According to Hardy, Mowlem and Burt civilised a once provincial fishing village. Hardy even attempted to rationalise Mowlem's anachronistic monument to Alfred the Great, explaining how it was erected at the end of the Crimean War when battleships

⁸⁶⁵ Hardy, *Old Swanage Or Purbeck Past and Present*, 1.

⁸⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁶⁷ 'The grounds of the Hotel Grosvenor and Rockleigh were at one time a huge quarry'. Ibid., 31.

⁸⁶⁸ Ibid., vii.

had just returned to Portsmouth and some of their hulls had been studded with cannonballs. Hardy explained that Mowlem retrieved four cannonballs and placed them on the column to commemorate the end of the recent war. For Hardy, the monument to Alfred the Great was a respectable memorial and not the least bit absurd. Hardy's comprehensive historical knowledge negated the surrealism highlighted by Nash's article. Hardy mapped out the town with key historical dates that built a firm and rational picture of the development of Swanage in the reader's mind. Hardy orientated his reader, whereas Nash made him or her feel like a sailor that had just been washed ashore on a strange land. Nash wrote: 'For the purpose of this essay ... let us imagine a shipwrecked stranger struggling toward the shore through angry waves on a dark night'.⁸⁶⁹ The shipwreck was a metaphor for the collapse of rational thought. It represented a psychical exploration of unknown lands and appealed to the surrealist fascination with the exotic. The shipwrecked stranger steps onto foreign soil and illustrates the coming together of two different worlds. In 'The Second Manifesto of Surrealism' Breton described the surrealist desire to find that point in the mind where oppositional things ceased to be perceived as contradictions. According to Breton, these contradictions disappear in the 'shipwreck of the most beautiful reason in sleep'.⁸⁷⁰ The surrealist pursues the mental shipwreck, which disorientates the conventional workings of the mind like a dream. Nash's shipwrecked stranger behaves as though he is asleep, wandering through Swanage 'half-dead' and 'convinced his reason has left him'.⁸⁷¹ Psychologically, he does not wake up and to the end of the article remains disorientated. The stranger has little chance of orientating himself in the Swanage that Nash describes. His confusion can be read as a metaphor for the mental state of anyone visiting the town for the first time and encountering the additions brought by Mowlem and Burt. These additions made Swanage itself appear shipwrecked, as if a once rational town plan had been destroyed.

⁸⁶⁹ Nash, 'Swanage Or Seaside Surrealism', 127.

⁸⁷⁰ Breton, 'Second Manifesto of Surrealism', 123.

⁸⁷¹ Nash, 'Swanage Or Seaside Surrealism', 127.

Littered with debris from London, the town appealed to the surrealist concern with objects that had lost their original function. This was epitomised by the clockless clock tower looking out over the Dorset coastline (fig. 60). The clock tower had outlived its use and stood as a reminder of the ephemeral nature of purpose and function. Breton, in his foreword to *La Femme 100 Têtes*, wrote that everything has a use other than the one generally attributed to it'.⁸⁷² He claimed:

It is even out of the conscious sacrifice of their primary usage (to manipulate an object for the first time not knowing what is or was its use) that certain transcendent properties can be deduced, properties that belong to another given or possible world where, for example an axe can be taken for a sunset ... where former lives, actual lives, future lives melt together into one life.⁸⁷³

John Armstrong explained that Nash 'appreciated a particular beauty in the transitoriness of accepted things, he has acknowledged even the limitation of infinity, that last refuge of conventional mysticism, and, endeavouring to emphasise its finite quality, has made it a penetrable passage over and around its edifice of mutable forms'.⁸⁷⁴ In conjunction with Armstrong's description of Nash, Walter Benjamin's discussion of clocks seems relevant:

calendars do not measure time in the way clocks do; they are monuments of an historical consciousness of which not the slightest trace has been apparent in Europe, it would seem, for the past hundred years. In the July Revolution an incident occurred in which this consciousness came into its own. On the first evening of fighting it so happened that the dials on clocktowers were being fired at simultaneously and independently from several locations in Paris.⁸⁷⁵

While Mowlem and Burt destabilised time through the erection of the clockless clock tower at Swanage, the revolutionaries shot at clock faces in France. The technological advancements of the nineteenth century seemed to speed up time and quickly outmode

⁸⁷² Breton, 'Foreword', 10.

⁸⁷³ Ibid.

⁸⁷⁴ Armstrong, 'The Present Tendency of Paul Nash', 234.

⁸⁷⁵ Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History', 395.

the past. The rags and refuse of modernity, which Benjamin took for his subject, punctuated this fast-paced chronological progression and chimed with the Swanage clock tower. These remnants of an almost forgotten past produced slits in time and caused ‘a process of folding, convolution and involution: the uncanny is now placed in the foreground and comes abruptly to the surfaces of experience; contradictions are revealed and held in tension as rift-design’.⁸⁷⁶ While Hardy viewed Mowlem and Burt as pioneers of the town’s progress, Nash saw them as inhibitors of narrative and instigators of a chronological jumble. Nash described the collage-like appearance that Mowlem and Burt gave to the town: ‘The Wren facade of bad but genuine design grafted onto the later nineteenth-century Town Hall, or the discovery of the huge clockless clock tower, a repulsive Victorian-Gothic structure, grey and papery against the solid sea, standing in the remains of a villa garden, jutting out over a lonely beach’.⁸⁷⁷ Nash presented an assortment of ill-matched textures, styles and dimensions pasted together by Mowlem and Burt, who caused the town to undergo a process of ‘folding, convolution and involution’.⁸⁷⁸ Swanage would have caused problems for an archaeologist like Wheeler, whose ‘grid system’ could not quantify material that had been misplaced spatially. Wheeler’s grid could make no account for identity changes unless obvious modifications had been made to the object’s physical appearance. The Swanage signposts, which still carried London place names, would have thoroughly misled Wheeler. If he were to excavate Swanage in the future and discover one of the London street-signs, still intact and standing firmly in the ground, he would assume that it bore the name of the excavated area. Even if the sign were later taken to be an anomaly, its discovery would have initially disrupted Wheeler’s investigations, which relied on a stable principle of identity that Mowlem and Burt’s additions destroyed. Modernity’s rational methodology could not account for surrealist collage, which repositioned objects and altered original meanings.

⁸⁷⁶ Lane, *Reading Walter Benjamin: Writing Through the Catastrophe*, 141.

⁸⁷⁷ Nash, ‘Swanage Or Seaside Surrealism’, 128.

⁸⁷⁸ Lane, *Reading Walter Benjamin: Writing Through the Catastrophe*, 141.

At the end of 'Swanage Or Seaside Surrealism' Nash observed the town's collage-like appearance when the shipwrecked stranger entered Durlston Castle, walked into 'an immense deserted room, tenanted by what seems hundreds of empty tables and chairs. A long, empty counter curves away into shadows. Behind the counter stands *La femme 100 têtes*'.⁸⁷⁹ Nash transformed Ernst's collage novel into a 'waitress in Durlston Castle restaurant, which, as its emptiness suggests, never seems to have been much of a going concern'.⁸⁸⁰ Although Nash situated *La Femme 100 Têtes* within a dark, neglected recess of Swanage, Ernst's collage-novel haunted the shipwrecked stranger throughout his journey across the town. Numerous objects, curiously similar to those seen in *La Femme 100 Têtes*, appeared to him. For example, the great globe that dominated chapter four of Ernst's novel disturbed the stranger as he walked along the Swanage cliff-edge (fig. 61). Nash reinforced the connection between *La Femme 100 Têtes* and 'Swanage Or Seaside Surrealism' by claiming that after the shipwrecked stranger encountered the globe he heard 'the cry of Loplop in his ears'.⁸⁸¹ Loplop was Ernst's symbol for himself, which he conceived around 1929 while making *La Femme 100 Têtes*. Nash's article includes a commercially made photograph, perhaps a postcard, of the Swanage globe.⁸⁸² The globe is situated on a flat ledge carved into the face of the cliff, however, the angle of the photograph hides this so that all the viewer can see is its position on the cliff-edge sloping down to the sea. From this angle the globe looks precarious, as though it is rolling down the slope. Nash's globe communicated a volatility that abounds in Ernst's collage novel. At the end of chapter four of *La Femme 100 Têtes* a female nude is draped sorrowfully over a globe, her head rests in her hands and a few men dig in the wasteland behind her. Accompanying the collage are the words; 'living alone on her phantom globe, beautiful and dressed in her dreams: Perturbation, my sister, the hundred headless

⁸⁷⁹ Nash, 'Swanage Or Seaside Surrealism', 128.

⁸⁸⁰ Walker, *So Exotic, So Homemade: Surrealism, Englishness and Documentary Photography*, 41.

⁸⁸¹ Nash, 'Swanage Or Seaside Surrealism', 128.

⁸⁸² Walker, *So Exotic, So Homemade: Surrealism, Englishness and Documentary Photography*, 41.

woman'.⁸⁸³ The globe is presented as an invasive force. Accordingly, 'perturbation' is the English translation of the German word 'wirrwarr' (chaos), which suggests that Ernst's sister and her globe are not where they should be either physically or mentally. There is no discernible narrative to the chapter but it is tempting to link the first set of collages with the last because they both contain sexually provocative women that are intimately connected to spherical shapes. The reader of *La Femme 100 Têtes* constantly makes and remakes spurious connections between Ernst's images, which speak more of a desire to form patterns than of an underlying coherence within the novel. Werner Spies claims that Ernst's 'collages are not picture-puzzles; they represent an irreducible resistance to belief in explicability and, hence, to intellectual systems which can conceive of life and the world only in terms of a causal chain'.⁸⁸⁴ Ernst's collages break the notion of a historical continuum. However, the desire to maintain the illusion of progress is so engrained in Western culture that the reader does their best to piece it back together. Spies argues that Ernst intended his readers to construct a story connecting his collages, which hang together in a complex web of associations that can not be untangled: 'The provocative links between the various plates of *La Femme 100 Têtes* were doubtlessly intentional. The scenes of each chapter are lent coherence by the repetition of certain motifs. Lured on by the ostensible causality engendered by these structuring elements, the viewer begins searching for causality in detail, only to be baffled by the evidence'.⁸⁸⁵ While there are superficial relationships between the collages in *La Femme 100 Têtes* there are no causal relationships. As Breton said in his foreword to the book: 'our marvellous journey through *La Femme 100 Têtes* seems to skip some pages like a girl skips a rope'.⁸⁸⁶ The disruption of linear narrative represents the surrealist rejection of conventional storytelling, which was seen to predetermine and therefore limit the reader's engagement with the text. Like 'Swanage Or Seaside Surrealism', *La Femme 100 Têtes* reads as a

⁸⁸³ Ernst, *The Hundred Headless Woman*, 163.

⁸⁸⁴ Spies, 'An Aesthetic of Detachment', 30.

⁸⁸⁵ Spies, 'The Collage Novels and Loplop', 184.

⁸⁸⁶ Breton, 'Foreword', 9.

succession of surprises. Both texts are unpredictable because their narratives are punctuated with chronological gaps that cause the story to jump from situation to situation.⁸⁸⁷ Order is usurped as things reveal themselves from unusual angles and demonstrate the ability to outlive human convention. The worlds of Nash and Ernst, like the world of Benjamin, are littered with relics of the past that refuse to fully decay.

Nash was interested in the way the outmoded object, stripped of utility, could be approached with an emotional irrationality that gave it a mythic presence. This presence is also associated with the illustrations in *La Femme 100 Têtes*, which Breton likened to the Rocambole books. Breton explained that these books, intended for people who could not read, were among the few things capable of moving the people who had read everything to tears.⁸⁸⁸ Their illustrations were not reducible to literal representations of narrative but remained free from definitive meaning and were therefore able to reveal the special nature of dreams, which is mystery and inexplicability.⁸⁸⁹ In a conventional novel the reader puzzles over enigmas in search of a reason behind everything. For Breton, the need for explanation made for flat adventure stories with predictable endings. He described how Ernst's collages were full of an agitation that was captivating because it was left unexplained. The reader of *La Femme 100 Têtes* must accept that the origin of these images is lost. Breton described the old books that Ernst cut up for his collages as enigmatic survivors of a long forgotten past.⁸⁹⁰ In this sense they are just like Mowlem and Burt's additions to Swanage. While the clock tower stood unremarkable at the foot of London Bridge, overshadowed by the neighbouring landmarks, it appeared extraordinary on the Swanage coastline looking out to sea. The Victorian entrepreneurs destroyed chronology in a similar manner to Ernst. Mowlem and Burt's anachronistic additions to the town made it difficult to map the different eras of Swanage's history. The collages of

⁸⁸⁷ In 'Swanage Or Seaside Surrealism' time jumps from the nineteenth-century (Crimean war) to King Alfred's victory over the Danes in the ninth century. Nash, 'Swanage Or Seaside Surrealism', 127.

⁸⁸⁸ Breton, 'Foreword', 7.

⁸⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁹⁰ Ibid.

Ernst, Mowlem and Burt offered a number of disconcerting conjectures about origins that never reached a final conclusion. Breton described Ernst's collages to be like the meticulous reconstruction of a crime witnessed in a dream, without one having the least concern for naming the motive of the assassin.⁸⁹¹ In accordance with this, Nash did not search for the reasons why Swanage appeared as it did but instead focused on the town's extraordinary character. In contrast, Hardy attempted to present the motive and reason behind Mowlem and Burt's actions. In *Old Swanage* the story of the town builds up in neat succession. This is not the case with 'Swanage Or Seaside Surrealism', which is founded upon lost moments that give those that survive a disquieting presence.⁸⁹² Hardy on the other hand, working like the archaeologist, attempted to restore the past completely from its fragments. 'Swanage Or Seaside Surrealism' demonstrated how Nash paid witness to the past without rationalising it or reducing it to its most literal translations. Through collage Nash refuted the return to an origin and accepted that there was no heart of the matter to be revealed. Harris states that the 'process of collage becomes an archaeological dig in reverse as the geological strata are built up, glued together and inked over'.⁸⁹³ This is a useful analogy, for while archaeology attempted to dispel the recourse to myth that was prevalent in the work of its antiquarian predecessors like Browne and Stukeley, collage helped reinstate myth by obscuring historical fact with an abundance of disorganised material. Collages, like myths, 'have no radioactive half-life that would ensure that their inexplicability would gradually decay into inert meaning and literalness'.⁸⁹⁴ This chapter has demonstrated how Nash's developing interest in myth was facilitated by his increasing affiliation to a romantic form of surrealism. I conclude with a discussion of myth in Nash's work from the 1940s and examine how his return to the Wittenham Clumps was shaped by his engagements with antiquarians and archaeologists in the previous decade.

⁸⁹¹ Ibid.

⁸⁹² Breton, 'Foreword', 9.

⁸⁹³ Harris, *Romantic Moderns*, 29.

⁸⁹⁴ Spies, 'An Aesthetic of Detachment', 30.

Conclusion

By the 1940s, as Nash's health worsened and the prospect of death crept closer, his paintings started to look skywards. The sky had been a preoccupation of his early work, for example in *Vision at Evening* and Wittenham Clump's *The Wood on the Hill* (1912), but in time was mostly replaced by grounded images of Belgian battlefields and British orchards. I argue that when Nash returned to the sky, almost thirty years later, his perception had been shaped by his antiquarian fieldwork, which had uncovered Browne's and Stukeley's interest in religion and myth. I examine how the antiquarians' imaginations developed Nash's perception of the sky above the Wittenham Clumps and I argue that these late paintings continued his critique of archaeological practice. Nash's aerial paintings recommenced when the Air Ministry employed him as a war artist in 1940. Nash's war painting *Totes Meer* (1940-1, fig. 62) presents a heap of crashed German aeroplanes. A crescent moon, which recalls Samuel Palmer, hangs in the sky.⁸⁹⁵ In a letter to Kenneth Clark, Nash described the animating effect that the moon had on the planes: 'By moonlight, this waning moon, one could swear they began to move and twist and turn as they did in the air'.⁸⁹⁶ I discuss how the moon was an important symbol in the mythology of Nash's late aerial paintings and was closely related to the ideas of death and regeneration expressed by the crashed, yet apparently still moving, planes in *Totes Meer*. Causey elaborates on this war painting: 'Nash did not believe in the finality of any kind of death, and it is not only his nature pictures which infer cyclical movements'.⁸⁹⁷ I argue that mythology evoked a similar sense of immortality for Nash, as the modern tendency for myth making imitated, and thereby somewhat revived, ancient practices. The movement of renewal can be seen on a smaller scale as Nash echoed Palmer's crescent moon in *The Pyramids in the Sea* (1912) and then again in the much later *Totes Meer*. As the reappearance of the moon in Nash's war painting suggests, his artistic career had its own

⁸⁹⁵ See Samuel Palmer's *Moonlight, a Landscape with Sheep* (ca. 1831-3).

⁸⁹⁶ Nash, 'Totes Meer', 160.

⁸⁹⁷ Causey, *Paul Nash*, 315.

cyclical pattern. I argue that Nash's deteriorating health and the Second World War provoked nostalgia and caused some of his later paintings to exhibit the 'English whimsy' that Malcolm Yorke recognises in his work from the early 1910s.⁸⁹⁸ John Rothenstein states that 'Nash's maturity had rejoined his youth. As in youth he was, in these fantasies, still capable of silliness'.⁸⁹⁹ Rothenstein speaks specifically of Nash's late article 'Aerial Flowers' (1945):

I was mooning about the garden lately when a very distinct communiqué came into my head having all the makings of a proper subject for 'collage'. I had been breaking off the dying, dark, ethereal flowers of a favourite poisonous plant when I heard – *Last night heavy and medium hellebores bombed the mountains of the Moon*. You would think nothing could be more straightforward. But when I came to assemble my material – a full sheet of Cattermole paper (itself the colour of a moonlight night) and the dried pressed hellebores and their seed pods (for the bombs), the plate of the Moon's surface by Nasmyth extracted from my second-best book on the Heavens seemed to complete the corpus apart from whatever drawing and painting was necessary. But Nasmyth would not play. He remained somehow incongruous.⁹⁰⁰

Despite the failure of Nash's enterprise, he believed the idea was important enough to record in his article, which closes with a comment on the connection between death and flight: 'Death, about which we are all thinking, death, I believe, is the only solution to this problem of how to be able to fly'.⁹⁰¹ 'Aerial Flowers' returns to the ideas of death and resurrection that Nash was considering fourteen years earlier when making his illustrations for *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus*.⁹⁰² The mention of hellebores specifically revisits this line from Browne's second essay: 'King *Attalus* lives for his poysonous plantations of *Aconites*, Henbane, Hellebore, and plants hardly admitted within

⁸⁹⁸ Yorke, *The Spirit of Place: Nine Neo-Romantic Artists and Their Times*, 36.

⁸⁹⁹ Rothenstein, *Paul Nash*, 5.

⁹⁰⁰ Nash, 'Aerial Flowers', 160.

⁹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 161.

⁹⁰² Browne highlights the cyclicity of life when he explains how the urn's womb-like shape makes 'our last bed like our first; nor much unlike the urns of our nativity, while we lay in the nether part of the earth'. Browne, *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus ... with Thirty Drawings by Paul Nash. Edited with an Introduction by John Carter*, 32.

the walls of Paradise'.⁹⁰³ The hellebore is a poisonous plant and the side effects of its ingestion include incessant vomiting, dilated pupils, slowing pulse and constriction of the throat.⁹⁰⁴ Appropriately, this deathly plant was unable to bomb the moon, which Nash indirectly referred to as heaven and therefore the paradise that Browne claimed the hellebore could not enter.⁹⁰⁵ Nash decided to use one of James Nasmyth's Victorian lunar photographs for his collage but his idea failed as 'the flower's cup slipped and fell upon the crater's lip'.⁹⁰⁶ The hellebore and moon do not collaborate and Nash's failed experiment represents his inability to seize the moon. This is pertinent to Nasmyth's photographs, which actually derived from drawings of a telescopic vision of the moon (fig. 63). Nasmyth used black and white crayons to illustrate the shadows that the sun casts on the moon's craters. From these shadows he constructed a three-dimensional model of the moon in plaster, which he then photographed. Therefore, the image that Nash wanted to use for his collage was not of the moon itself but of a science-fiction type replica. Nasmyth's models generated an embodied, and thereby fantastical, engagement with the moon. Despite their scientific acclaim, the artfulness of these photographs tacitly expressed humankind's distance from the moon and the problems of perception that this causes. Frances Robertson notes that seeing 'was the only source of knowledge available to Victorian moon observers, but it also forced into consciousness the accompanying acts of imagination and calculation that turned a flat silver disc into a world that was, in Galileo's phrase, 'just like the surface of the Earth itself'.⁹⁰⁷ In a sense, Nash's failure to seize the moon in collage highlighted the fantasy on which Nasmyth's photographs were founded. Like Nasmyth, Nash was distanced from his subject when studying the Wittenham Clumps in the 1940s. Illness meant he could no longer roam

⁹⁰³ Browne, *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus ... with Thirty Drawings by Paul Nash. Edited with an Introduction by John Carter*, 64.

⁹⁰⁴ Ilott, 'Poisoning by Hellebore', 819.

⁹⁰⁵ Nash writes that 'the plate of the Moon's surface by Nasmyth extracted from my second-best book on the Heavens'. Nash, 'Aerial Flowers', 160. Browne, *Urne Buriall and The Garden of Cyrus ... with Thirty Drawings by Paul Nash. Edited with an Introduction by John Carter*, 64.

⁹⁰⁶ Nash, 'Aerial Flowers', 160.

⁹⁰⁷ Robertson, 'Science and Fiction: James Nasmyth's Photographic Images of the Moon', 602-3.

freely about the countryside and was therefore restricted to drawing Wittenham through field glasses, from a window around eight miles away at his friend Hilda Harrison's house. Nash notes:

my recent landscapes are, as it were, recreations of one actual scene – the prospect as seen from the house I go to stay at on Boar's Hill where there is a wide window ... looking across the garden to the Berkshire Downs on the horizon. Between the farthest woods and the downs rise up the twin hills of the Wittenham Clumps [...]. Actually they are a long way from Boar's Hill and I have to look at them through my field glasses.⁹⁰⁸

The early paintings were carried out at a close proximity to the site and consequently few objects stood between Nash and the Clumps in the 1910s. In contrast, the field glasses brought eight miles of landscape into perspective, causing the foreground of the later paintings to be littered with numerous objects, such as snakes, sunflowers and fencing. These things were mostly imagined, rather than real, and Nash claimed that he did not bother with what grew where: 'I find most things grow where I paint them'.⁹⁰⁹ These objects, which are common Nash symbols, highlight the mediation of his late paintings, which he claimed disregarded 'the so-called truths of appearance and knowledge'.⁹¹⁰

The moon became a recurrent symbol in Nash's late Wittenham paintings.⁹¹¹ Discussing his recent fascination with celestial life, Nash stated that he had 'become increasingly absorbed in the study of light and the drama of the great luminaries – particularly the moon and her influence upon all nocturnal objects whether on earth or in heaven'.⁹¹² For Nash the moon was a symbol of rebirth, therefore its remoteness in 'Aerial Flowers' was appropriate at a time when he knew his life was ending. According to Bertram, Nash associated the moon with 'the symbol of the female principle, or the

⁹⁰⁸ Nash quoted in Bertram, *Paul Nash: The Portrait of an Artist*, 286-7.

⁹⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁹¹⁰ Typed Document with Autograph Annotations for 'Landscape of the Vernal Equinox', 1943, TGA 769/1/39, Paul Nash Collection, Tate Archive, London.

⁹¹¹ *Landscape of the Vernal Equinox* (1943) and *Landscape of the Moon's Last Phase* (1944).

⁹¹² Document, Commentary on Painting 'Battle of Britain', 1940-1, TGA 769/1/40-2, Paul Nash Collection, Tate Archive, London.

egg. At night, the sun is only manifest in its reflection, and that reflection, therefore, *at that time*, precedes the birth of the sun itself.⁹¹³ It is interesting to compare the ‘fertile’ moon with the hellebore, which historically was thought to induce miscarriage. Browne notes this misconception in *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, explaining how it was commonly assumed that ‘the juice thereof purgeth upward like Hellebore, and applied in pessaries provokes the menstruous flowes, and procures abortion’.⁹¹⁴ In contrast to this negative association, *Religio Medici* promotes the plant as a cure for madness.⁹¹⁵ The hellebore presents the duality of life and death. Nash’s research for his late paintings and collages may have revealed the moon’s similar polarity. Part of this research was Frazer’s *The Golden Bough*, which speculated that Diana was conceived as the yellow harvest moon and, filling the farmer’s grange with fruit, was associated with fertility and childbirth.⁹¹⁶ In contrast, Nasmyth’s book tacitly suggested the moon’s association with mortality when it compared the texture of the moon’s surface to the skin of a rotting apple and the wrinkled hands of an old man.⁹¹⁷ Frazer commented on the moon as a symbol of both life and death when he stated that ‘once upon a time the Moon contended that men should be like himself ... that is, he meant that just as he grows old, disappears, and comes in sight again, so men grown old should vanish for a while and then return to life’.⁹¹⁸ The waxing and waning of the moon resembles death and rebirth, exemplifying the cyclical pattern of nature. This is the subject of Nash’s late Wittenham painting, *Landscape of the Vernal Equinox*, which centres on the two mounds of the Clumps. The right Clump basks in warm sun and the left shimmers in blue moonlight. The full moon

⁹¹³ Bertram, *Paul Nash: The Portrait of an Artist*, 289.

⁹¹⁴ Browne, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica. Or Enquiries Into Very Many Received Tenents and Commonly Presumed Truths*, 433.

⁹¹⁵ Browne, ‘Religio Medici’, 116.

⁹¹⁶ Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, 141.

⁹¹⁷ ‘A long-kept shrivelled apple affords apt illustration of this wrinkle theory; another example may be observed in the human face and hand, when age has caused the flesh to shrink and so leave the comparatively unshrinking skin relatively too large as a covering for it [...]. Several parts of the lunar surface, as we shall by-and-by see, present us with the same appearance in a modified degree’. Carpenter and Nasmyth, *The Moon: Considered as a Planet, a World, and a Satellite*, 29.

⁹¹⁸ Frazer, *The Belief in Immortality and the Worship of the Dead*, 67.

matches the spherical shape of the sun to express equal day and night. Nash described their dichotomy:

Again, the thought of division into light and darkness in equal parts suggests a divided space wherein a landscape, on one side, is lit by the setting sun, while the other, lies under the influence of a rising moon. This, in turn, determines certain dominant colours. Red and deep yellows, with a range of fading and dying rose and pink, and blue, from its palest, cold tints, deepening to the tones of night.⁹¹⁹

The setting sun casts long shadows across the lawn and suggests death, while the full and rising moon hints at resurrection. Thirty years after first drawing the Clumps, Nash's perception of the site shifted to emphasise the interchange between life and death, which the equinox signifies through the equal division between day and night. I argue that *Landscape of the Vernal Equinox* reinforced this dichotomy through imagery that Nash had cultivated through his engagements with Browne and Stukeley.

In the 1940s Nash started to paint the Clumps as a pair, rather than as a single mound, allowing him to explore the duality noted above. In *Landscape of the Vernal Equinox* a division between aerial and terrestrial life further stressed this duality. Earth and air are symbolised through the setting sun and rising moon respectively and their motions are emphasised by the clouds, which press the former into the ground and propel the latter into the air. Two thirds of the composition glows red from the sun, while a third is a cold, moonlit blue. This division cuts diagonally across the sky, through the trees and is marked by a faint line of fencing that trails off into the left corner of the painting. The sun-lit section highlights terrestrial life, picking out the two Clumps, a tree, a snake, a fence and bushes. In contrast, the moon fails to pick out any earthly objects and instead presents a selection of shapes coloured in varying blues and greens, which look like floating clouds. Causey describes the late Wittenham paintings: 'Regardless of

⁹¹⁹ Two Documents, Commentary on Painting 'Landscape of the Vernal Equinox', n.d., TGA 769/1/35-8, Paul Nash Collection, Tate Archive, London.

the actual shape of Nash's drawings and paintings, there is a verticality to many of his designs which contradicts the common assumption that landscapes, as panoramas, are naturally drawn in horizontal format. 'Higher' and 'lower' in Nash's art have spiritual and moral implications'.⁹²⁰ I argue that Nash developed this verticality in his illustrations for *Urne Buriall* and *The Garden of Cyrus*, particularly *Ghosts or Skeleton, Phoenix and Snake*. Bertram suggests both Browne's and Stukeley's influence on the late Wittenham painting: 'On the right is a structure of bare posts, once the supports of netting round a tennis court, which I see as the earlier skeleton forms and the *mansions of the dead* [my italics]; on the left is a snake'.⁹²¹ Although the snake is present in Nash's work before his engagement with Stukeley, the antiquarian's discussion of Avebury as a serpent temple must surely reinforce this symbol.⁹²² More specifically, Stukeley seems to reinforce a connection between the snake and sun in Nash's mind and these symbols are seen together in *Landscape of the Megaliths* (1937) and *Nest of the Phoenix* (1938). Stukeley suggests the solar associations of earthworks like Avebury: 'When these ancient patriarchal temples in other countries came to be perverted to idolatry, they consecrated many of them to the sun, thinking their round form ought to be referr'd to his disc; and that these pyramidal stones set in a circle, imitated his rays'.⁹²³ Although Stukeley suggests that these associations are incorrect, Nash considers the solar aspect of Avebury in *Landscape of the Megaliths* (1937) as he shows the snake, stone and convolvulus leaning towards the sun. Their positions are reflected in *Landscape of the Vernal Equinox*, as the snake, yew and wooden post also lean sunwards. It is likely that Stukeley was on Nash's mind when he undertook the painting in 1943. Not only did Nash revisit Avebury that year, but he was also developing a keen interest in the Druids, who Stukeley promoted.⁹²⁴ In February

⁹²⁰ Causey, *Paul Nash: Landscape and the Life of Objects*, 33.

⁹²¹ Bertram, *Paul Nash: Portrait of an Artist*, 293.

⁹²² Chapter fourteen of *Abury* discusses the site's likeness to the serpentine temples built by Cadmus.

⁹²³ Stukeley, *Abury: A Temple of the British Druids*, 9.

⁹²⁴ Nash writes that during 'the Summer of 1943, I was able to renew my acquaintance with the Avebury Megaliths in the course of a drive while staying at Hungerford. But they were altogether changed in appearance collectively. The work of reinstating and ordering the Circles had been completed. Sometimes the

1944 Nash wrote to Neilson, who had given him Stukeley's book: 'We must get down seriously to this business of Balder when I am with you – also Druids – for God's sake call up all Druids on the book network ... strange and awful fellows Druids with strange and awful practices'.⁹²⁵ Nash was particularly interested in the Druid's reverence for the oak and mistletoe and planned a new painting based on the theme: 'Well, the Bough is about my next subject. The mistletoe-lightening bunch flashing in the storm sky'.⁹²⁶ Nash marked this section of his copy of *The Golden Bough*: 'Druids cut the mistletoe, not with a common knife, but with a golden sickle, and why when cut, it was not suffered to touch the earth; probably they thought that the celestial plant would have been profaned and its marvellous virtue lost by contact with the ground'.⁹²⁷ Frazer discussed the verdant mistletoe that grows on the leafless oak in winter. Legend states that the oak-spirit resides in the mistletoe, which is poised on the tree trunk or branches in a position that resembles a middle point between heaven and earth. The above citation highlights how the plant must not touch the earth and thereby lose its intermediate location between the mortal and immortal world. Like the moon and the Clumps, the mistletoe presents an interchange between life and death, which profoundly concerns Nash in the 1940s. His 1943 notebook reads:

But the mistletoe considered in the Golden Bough does not die with the oak because the bough of the dead mistletoe increases in colour and in the case of the yellow berried mistletoe the 'dead' plant is more golden than the living [...]. The causes of the golden appearance are the character of the stem which 'takes' the light in a particular way and by reason of the stem being covered often by a golden lichen. The leaves also light up with a curious gold transparency. Furthermore, both plants broken off from the oak or other tree, as they dry tend to become more golden so that the

effect was immensely impressive. I made a few rapid drawings and took a spool of photographs'. Nash, 'Stones', 155.

⁹²⁵ Sir Edward Marsh, Enid Marx, Henry Moore, Mrs. George Mortimer, Mrs. J. N. Macdonald, Barbara Nash, Claire Neilson, n.d., TAM 38.5, Paul Nash Collection, Tate Archive, London.

⁹²⁶ Nash quoted in Bertram, *Paul Nash: Portrait of an Artist*, 294.

⁹²⁷ Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*. Vol. 7, *Balder the Beautiful. The Fire-Festivals of Europe and the Doctrine of the External Soul*. 80.

gold of the bough seems to be a quality impossible to destroy in spite of death [...]. So as long as there is light the golden bough will live.⁹²⁸

It is difficult not to interpret the mistletoe's apparent immortality as solace for Nash as he neared the end of his life. Nash's notebook focused on the life-giving nature of the sun and this notion complemented his late vision of Wittenham. While the sun did not feature in his early Wittenham paintings, it was prominent in a great deal of the later work.⁹²⁹ As stated, in *Landscape of the Vernal Equinox* the snake, tree and fencing point towards the sun to demonstrate its importance. Similarly the St John's Wort stands to attention before the sun in *Landscape of the Summer Solstice* (fig. 64), while the sun's rays appear to make the sunflower spin in *Solstice of the Sunflower*. These paintings emphasise the sun's authority over the earth. Appropriately, in 1943 Nash was keen to find books on solar worship.⁹³⁰

In my introduction I demonstrated that in 1912 Nash saw the antiquity of the Wittenham Clumps through Pan and *The Wind in the Willows*. At the age of twenty-three his knowledge of myth was limited and derived from mainstream sources. I argue that Browne and Stukeley introduced Nash to their vast religious and mythological reserves, which he subsequently developed for himself through Frazer. The 1943 notebook demonstrates the wide scope of Nash's late vision in its mention of the seventh-century English monk Bede, the Irish mythology of Mogh Ruith and the biblical figure, Simon Magnus. These characters were seemingly research for a new series of paintings, which Nash referred to as 'paralogistical landscapes'.⁹³¹ He noted: 'New Series: Paralogism –

⁹²⁸ Three Notebooks by Paul Nash, ca. 1943, TGA 769/1/62-64, Paul Nash Collection, Tate Archive, London.

⁹²⁹ *Sunflower and Sun* (1942), *Landscape of the Vernal Equinox* (1943), *Landscape of the Summer Solstice* (1943), *Solstice of the Sunflower* (1945).

⁹³⁰ Three Notebooks by Paul Nash, ca. 1943, TGA 769/1/62-64, Paul Nash Collection, Tate Archive, London.

⁹³¹ Three Notebooks by Paul Nash, ca. 1943, TGA 769/1/62-64, Paul Nash Collection, Tate Archive, London.

illogical reasoning of which reason is unconscious'.⁹³² Paralogism's etymology, and its relation to adjectives like 'irregular', 'disordered' and 'improper', contrasts with archaeology's derivation from the Greek word *arkhaios* (ancient), which shares a root with *arkhos* (chief). Etymologically, 'paralogism' is rooted in fallacy, while 'archaeology' is rooted in fact. Nash's plan to paint paralogistical landscapes suggests that his partial interest in archaeological investigation, facilitated through his engagement with the excavations at Avebury and Maiden Castle, had fully disappeared by the 1940s. Nash's 1943 notebook highlights a sceptical attitude towards fact, which thoroughly opposed the progressive, scientific mindsets of both Keiller and Wheeler. In his notebook Nash discussed the pre-Copernican notion that the sun revolves around the earth and that the earth is at the centre of the universe: 'Sun revolved in heavens in 12 div. each with 6 spinnings with close fitting shutters and strong coverings which opened one by one as he passed to let through light of day. Path led through constellation of the sky. Revolving heavens of luminescence round the fixed earth at centre of universe'.⁹³³ To a degree, Browne and Stukeley supported geocentrism. Browne suggests his opposition to Copernicus' theory that the planets revolved around the sun in *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, which states: 'for had it [the sun] stood still, and were it fixed like the earth, there had been then no distinction of times, either of day or year, of Spring, or Autumn, of Summer, or of Winter: for these are seasons defined by the motions of the sun'.⁹³⁴ Over fifty years later, a young Stukeley disputed Copernicus' theory: 'when they were upon the Topic of the Earth's motion ... I thought it so improbably a Notion that I set my self to work to collect from Scripture & my own little Reasoning all the Arguments I could

⁹³² Three Notebooks by Paul Nash, ca. 1943, TGA 769/1/62-64, Paul Nash Collection, Tate Archive, London.

⁹³³ Three Notebooks by Paul Nash, ca. 1943, TGA 769/1/62-64, Paul Nash Collection, Tate Archive, London.

⁹³⁴ Browne, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica. Or Enquiries Into Very Many Received Tenents and Commonly Presumed Truths*, 353.

muster up'.⁹³⁵ Stukeley's views on geocentrism varied throughout his lifetime.⁹³⁶

However, this early comment predicted how his future studies would resort to Scripture as a counter-argument to science. Nash's geocentric statement suggests that by 1943 he was concerned with imaginative understandings of the world that disregarded modern facts. He claimed that in *Landscape of the Vernal Equinox* 'inspiration is drawn quite freely, disregarding the so-called truths of appearance and knowledge. Just as it would not be possible to find a period (of day or night) when the sun and moon are in such relationship, so it would be difficult, though not impossible, to recognise features of the landscape in the actual scene'.⁹³⁷ *Solstice of the Sunflower* presents Nash's imaginative perception of the site to an even more radical degree. The painting references the midsummer fires that took place on the solstice. Frazer explained that previous to the event, the sun climbs higher and higher in the sky and after midsummer it descends. He speculated that primitive peoples thought they could prevent the sun's descent through the lighting of bonfires, the procession of torches and the rolling of a fire wheel.⁹³⁸ Frazer claimed that on the summit of a hill 'stood a huge wheel completely encased in some straw ... a lighted torch was applied to the wheel, and as it burst into flames, two young fellows, strong limbed and swift of foot, seized the handles and began running with it down the slope'.⁹³⁹ Nash described his depiction of the firewheel in *Solstice of the Sunflower*:

In the solstice the spent sun shines from its zenith encouraging the sunflower in the dual role of the sun and firewheel to perform its mythological purpose. The sun appears to be whipping the sunflower like a top. The sunflower wheel tears over the hill cutting a path through the standing corn and bounding into the air as it gathers momentum. This is the blessing of the midsummer Fire'.⁹⁴⁰

⁹³⁵ Stukeley quoted in Boyd Haycock, *William Stukeley: Science, Religion and Archaeology in Eighteenth-Century England*, 15.

⁹³⁶ Boyd Haycock, *William Stukeley: Science, Religion and Archaeology in Eighteenth-Century England*, 16.

⁹³⁷ Typed Document with Autograph Annotations for 'Landscape of the Vernal Equinox', 1943, TGA 769/1/39, Paul Nash Collection, Tate Archive, London.

⁹³⁸ Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, 622.

⁹³⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁴⁰ Typed Document 'Final Sequence of 'Sunflower and Sun', Mounted on Board, 1945, TGA 769/1/46-47, Paul Nash Collection, Tate Archive, London.

Through the spinning wheel, Nash emphasised the motion of the sun, which again suggested his developing geocentrism.

Earlier paintings of the Wittenham Clumps are relatively naturalistic, while *Solstice of the Sunflower* and *Landscape of the Vernal Equinox* are full of symbolism drawn from Nash's developing interest in myth. Margot Eates states that the 'sight of these low but eternal hills, topped by their twin coronets of trees, stirred his memory and deepened his symbolic purpose, knowing, as he did, that his life's work was sweeping back, full circle, to its close'.⁹⁴¹ Towards the end of his life Nash returned to the Clumps with a vision enriched by the antiquarian imaginations of Browne and Stukeley and a critique of archaeology sharpened by the excavations of Keiller and Wheeler. While the archaeologist participated in the death of myth, Nash perceived antiquarianism as 'simply a part of a long story-telling tradition that has its origins in, and is not intrinsically different from, 'first myths''.⁹⁴² A few years before his death, Nash's engagement with the antiquarian imagination blossomed as he fully abandoned archaeology and steered his work deep into the heart of ancient ritual.

⁹⁴¹ Eates, *Paul Nash: The Master of the Image 1889-1946*, 85.

⁹⁴² Tilley, 'Digging with the Pen: Novel Archaeologies and Literary Traditions', 437.

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Illustrations



1 Paul Nash
The Wood on the Hill, 1912
Ink, chalk and watercolour on paper



2 Paul Nash
Whiteleaf Cross, 1931
 Oil on canvas



3 Paul Nash
Landscape of the Megaliths, 1934
 Oil on canvas



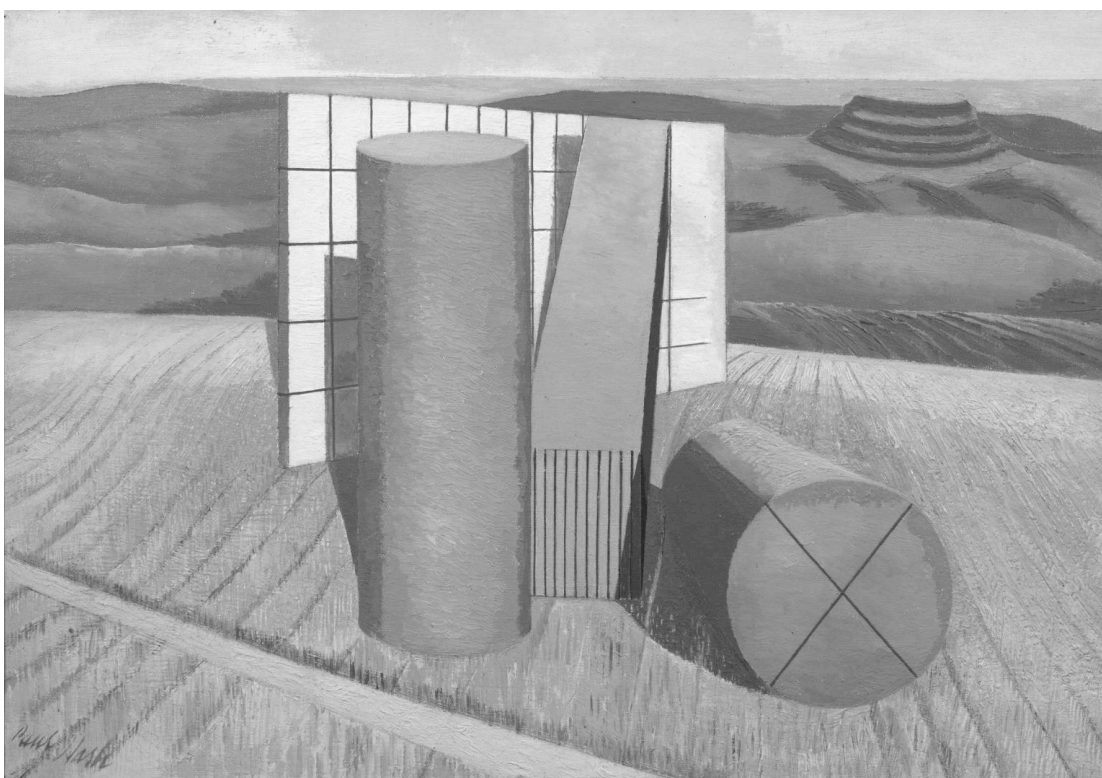
4 Paul Nash
The Quincunx Naturally Considered, 1932



5 Paul Nash
Swanage, ca. 1936
 Pencil, watercolour, graphite and photographic collage on paper



6 Paul Nash
Void, 1918
 Oil on canvas



7 Paul Nash
Equivalents for the Megaliths, 1935
 Oil on canvas



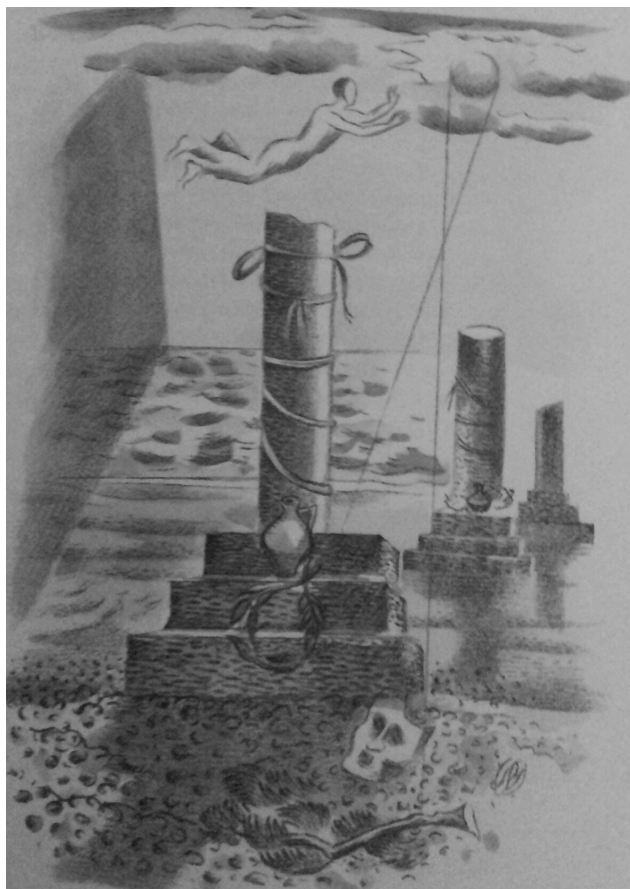
8 John Constable
Stonehenge, ca.1836
 Watercolour on paper



9 Paul Nash
Landscape of the Vernal Equinox, 1943
 Oil on canvas



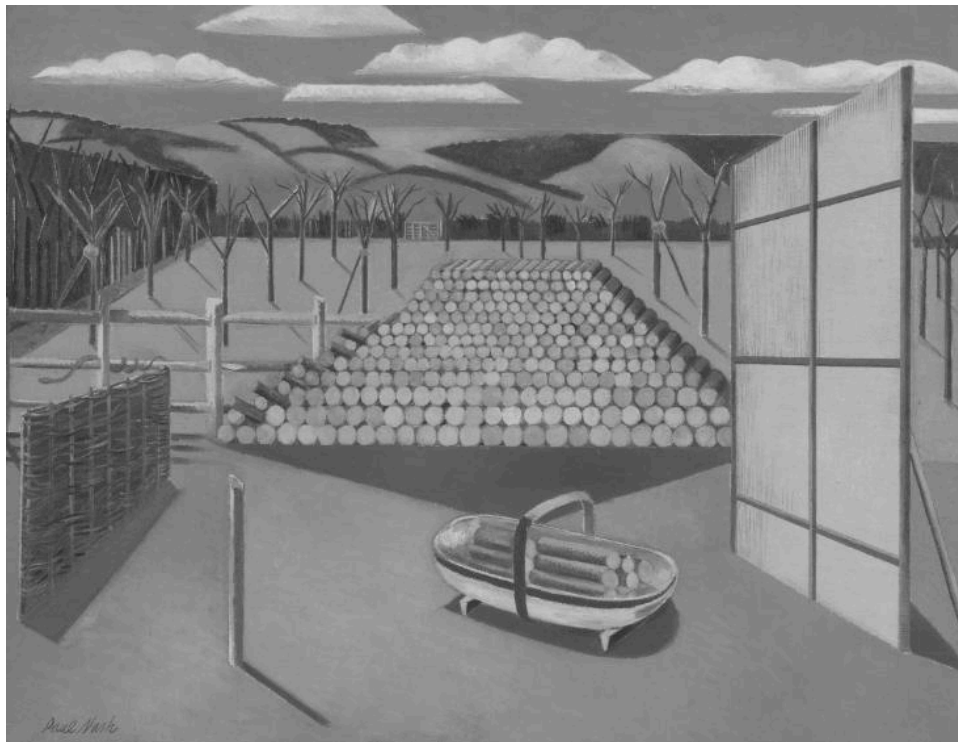
10 Paul Nash
Solstice of the Sunflower, 1945
 Oil on canvas



11 Paul Nash
Sorrow, 1932



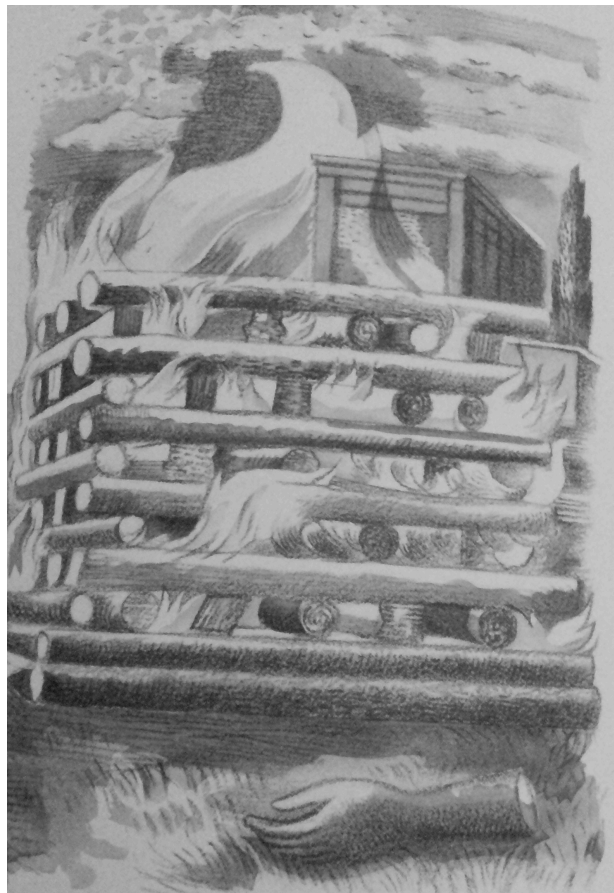
12 Paul Nash
The Opened Tomb, 1932



13 Paul Nash
Landscape at Iden, 1929
Oil on canvas



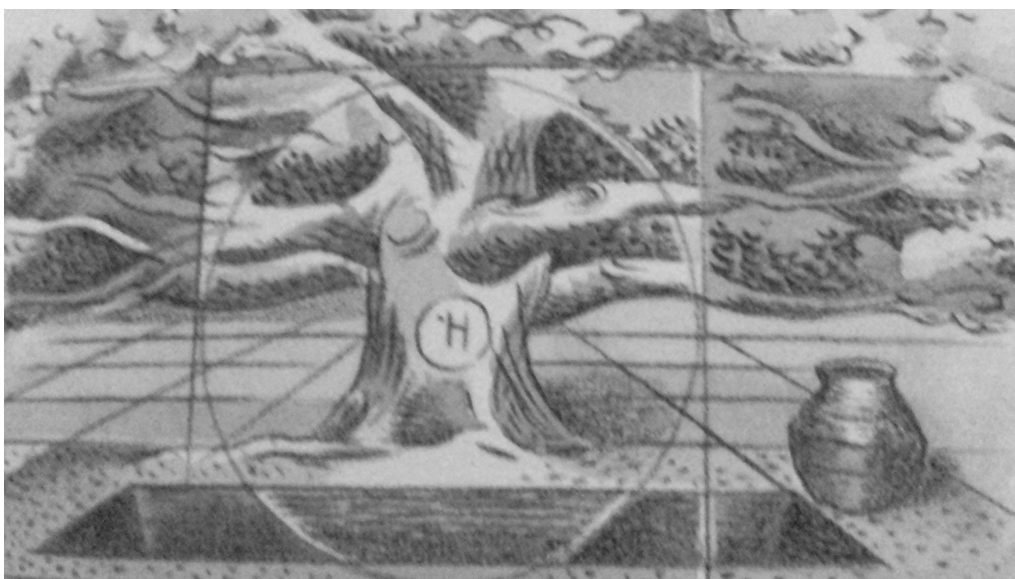
14 Paul Nash
We Are Making a New World, 1918
 Oil on canvas



15 Paul Nash
Funeral Pyre, 1932



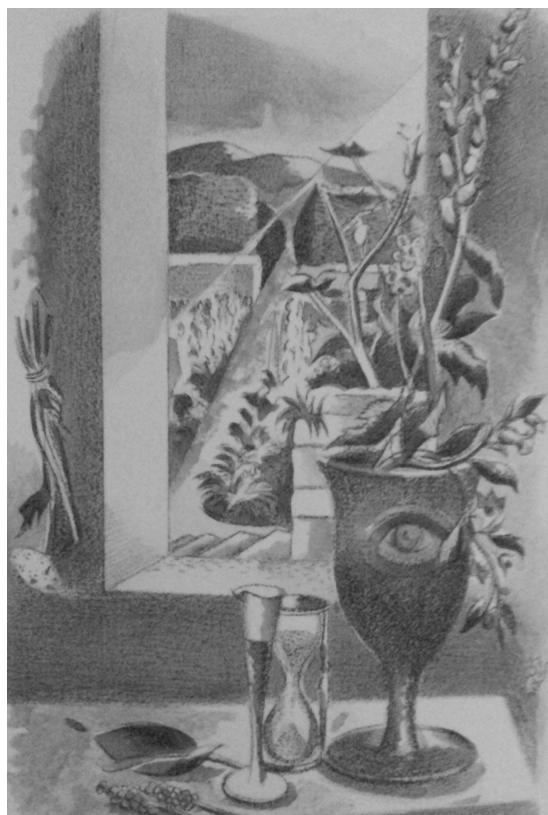
16 Paul Nash
Skeleton, Phoenix and Snake, 1932



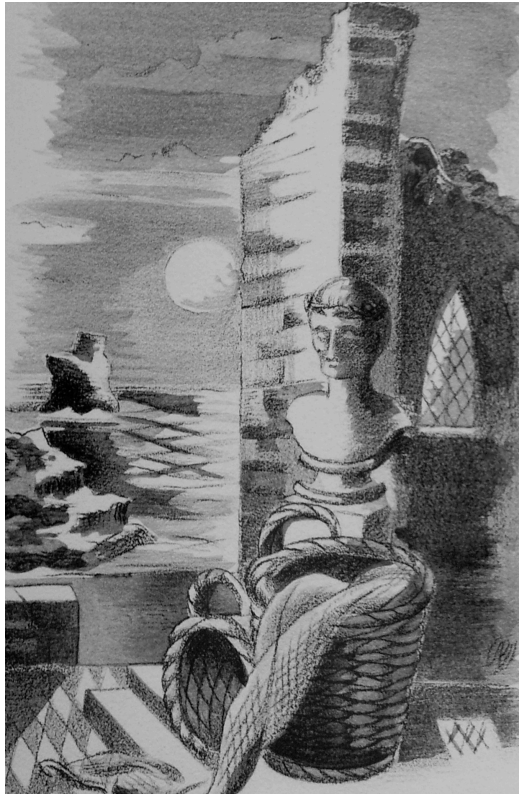
17 Paul Nash
Generations Passe, 1932



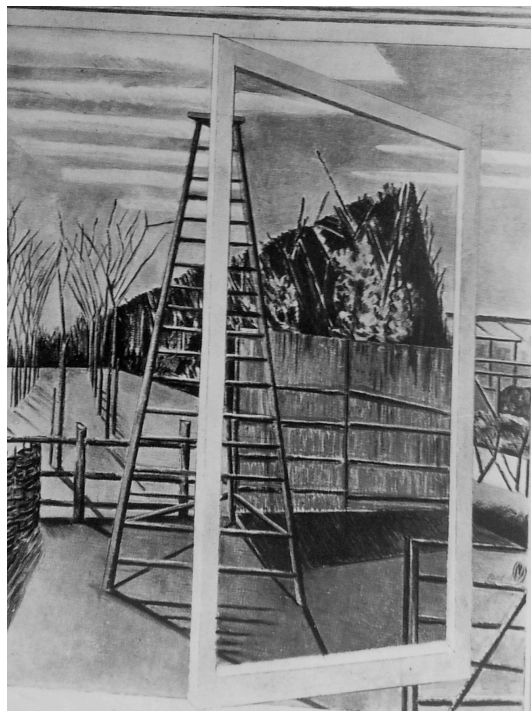
18 Paul Nash
Vegetable Creation, 1932



19 Paul Nash
Poysonous Plantations, 1932



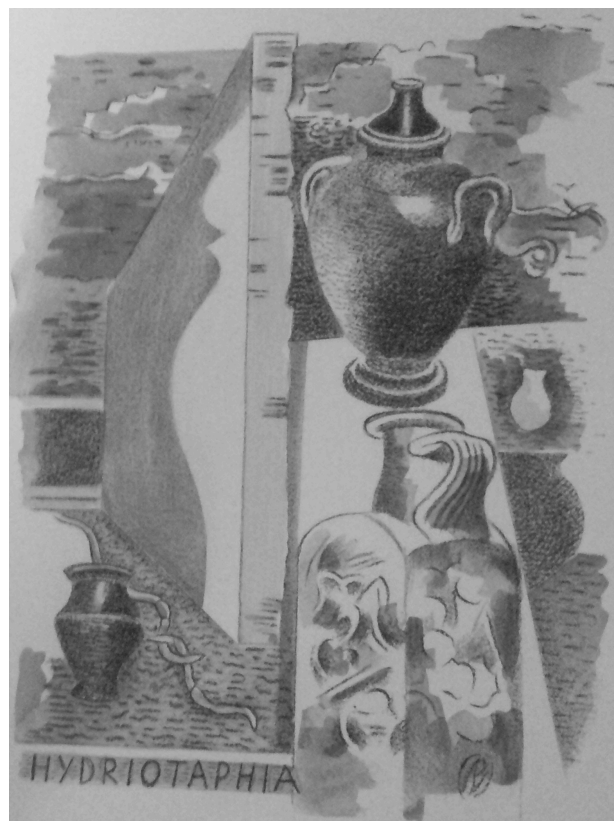
20 Paul Nash
The Quincunx Artificially Considered, 1932



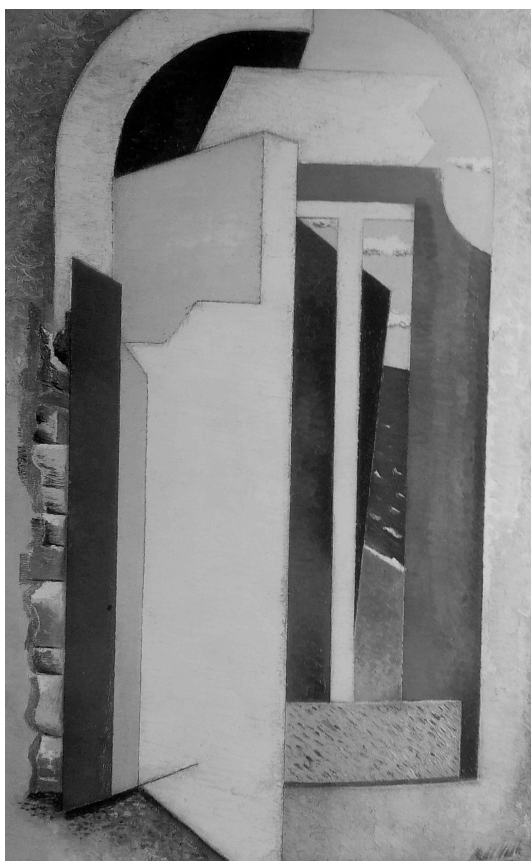
21 Paul Nash
Month of March, 1929
 Oil on canvas



22 Paul Nash
Ghosts, 1932



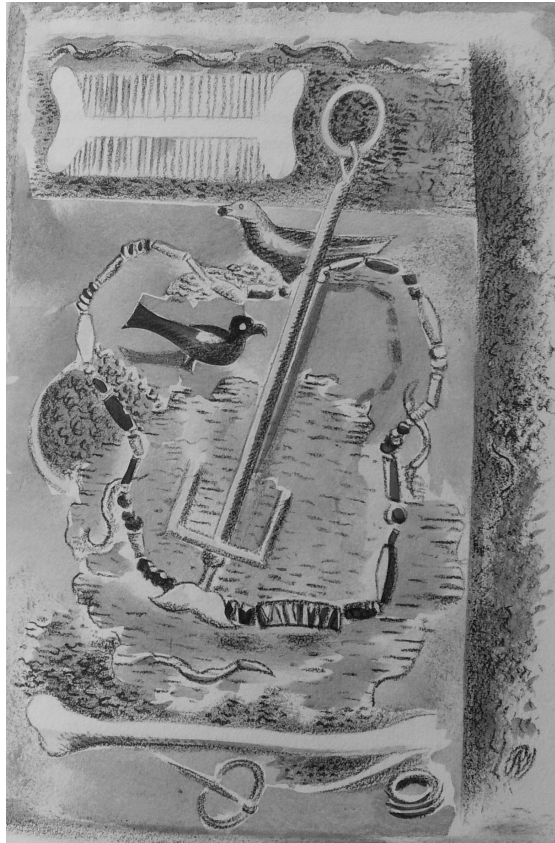
23 Paul Nash
Frontispiece, 1932



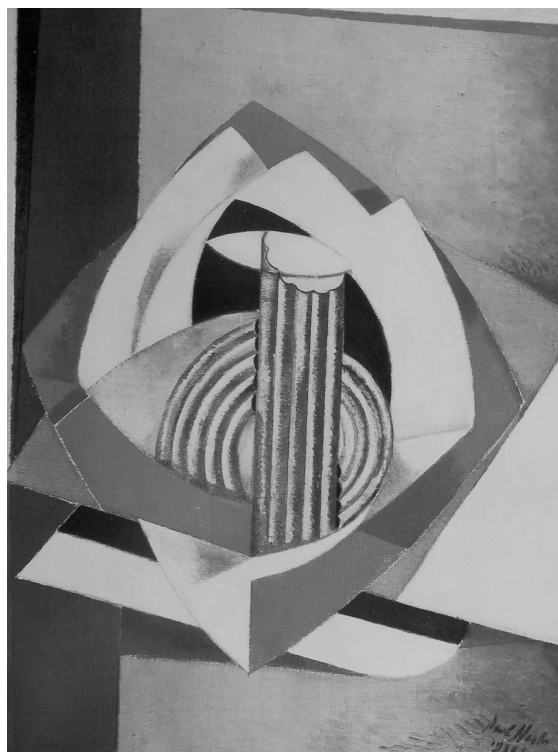
24 Paul Nash
Opening, 1930-1
Oil on canvas



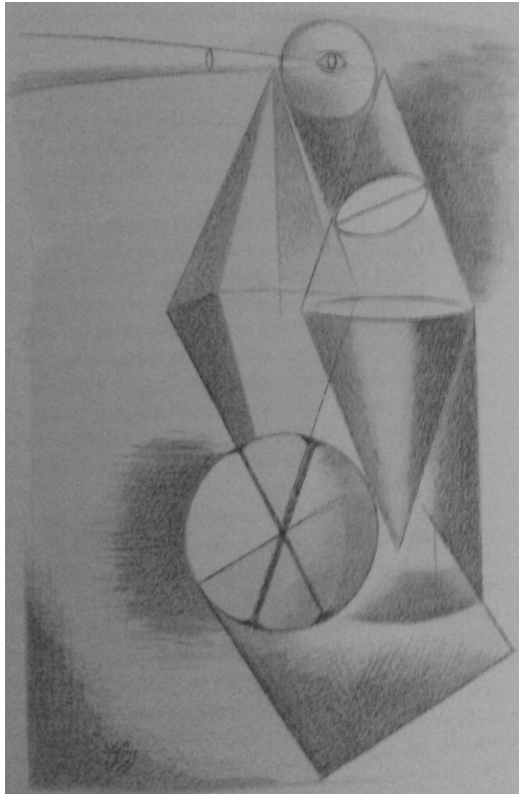
25 Paul Nash
Wittenham, 1935
Oil on canvas



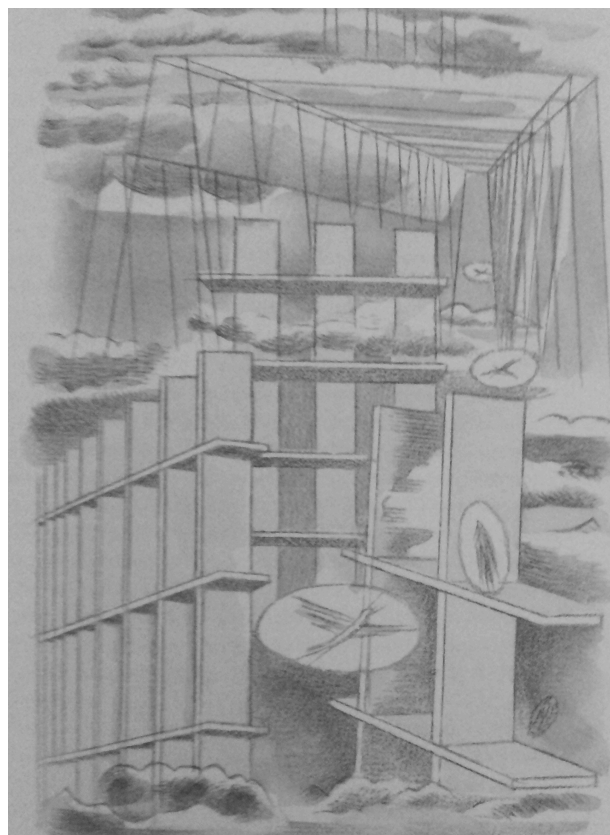
26 Paul Nash
Tokens, 1932



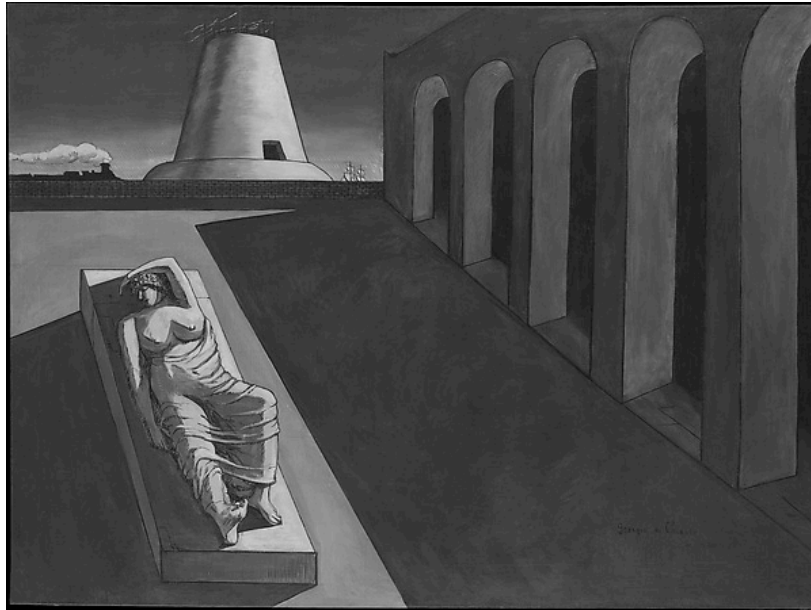
27 Paul Nash
Kinetic Feature, 1931
Oil on canvas



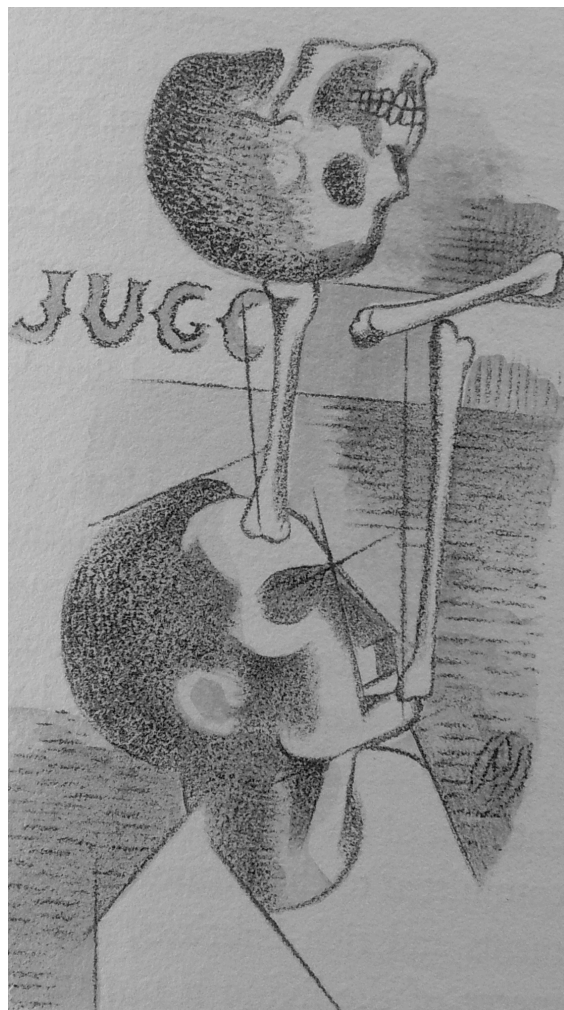
28 Paul Nash
The Quincunx Mystically Considered, 1932



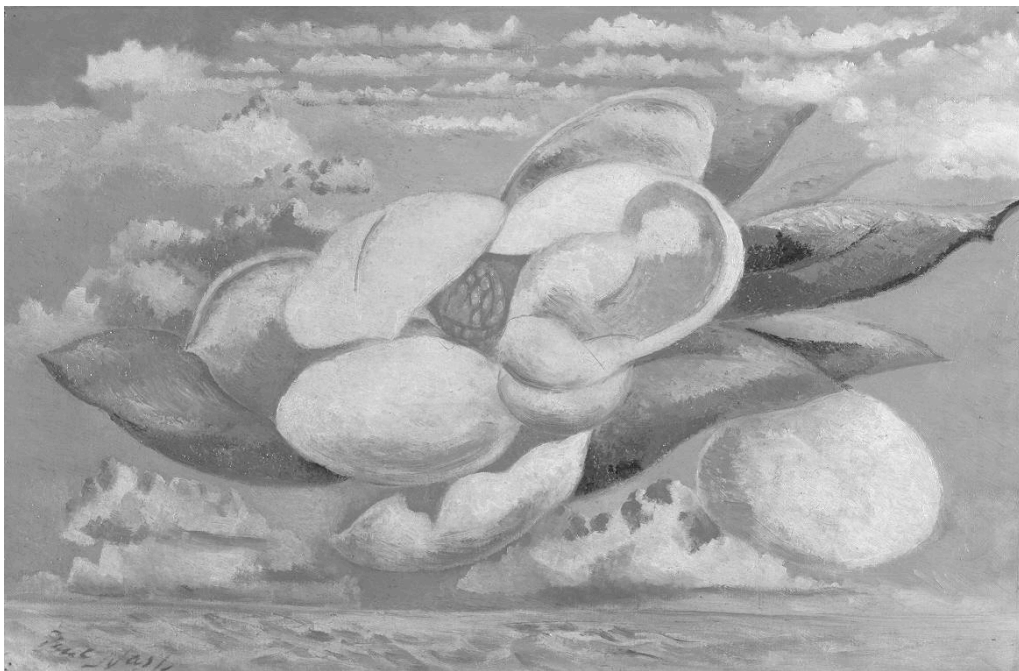
29 Paul Nash
Mansions of the Dead, 1932



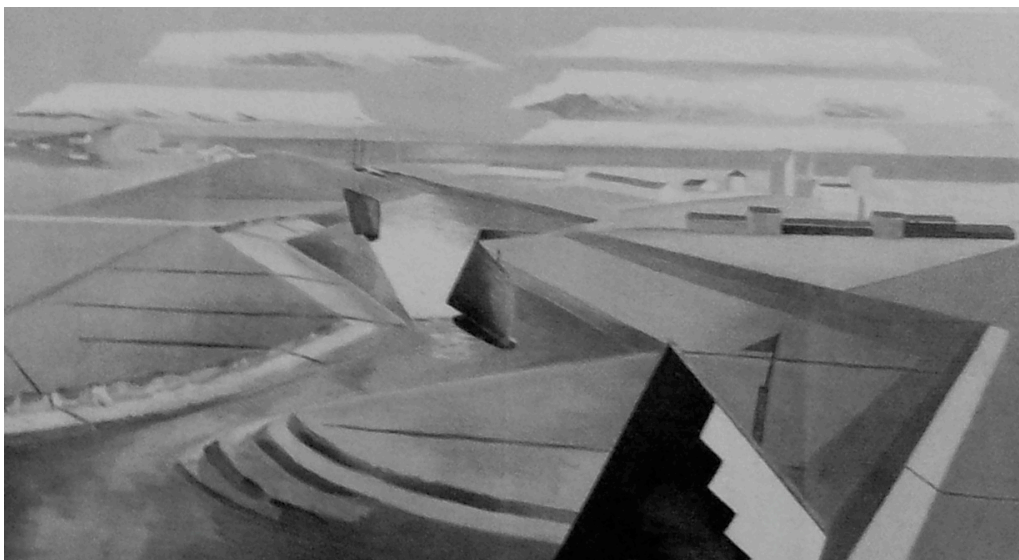
30 Giorgio de Chirico
Ariadne, 1913
 Oil on canvas



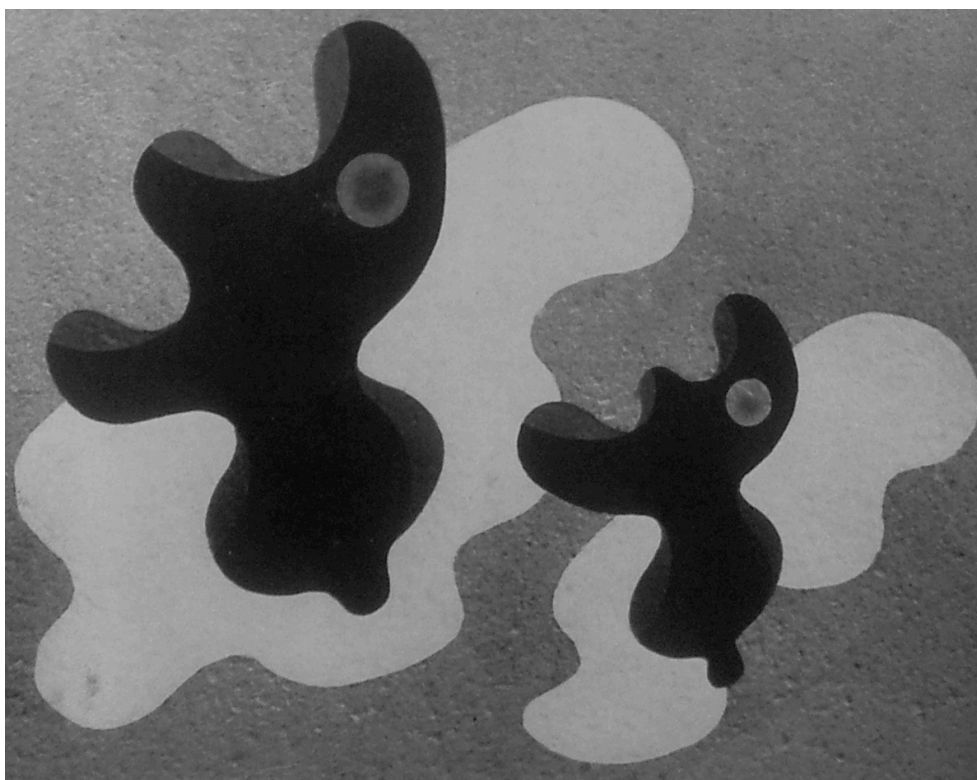
31 Paul Nash
Juglers, 1932



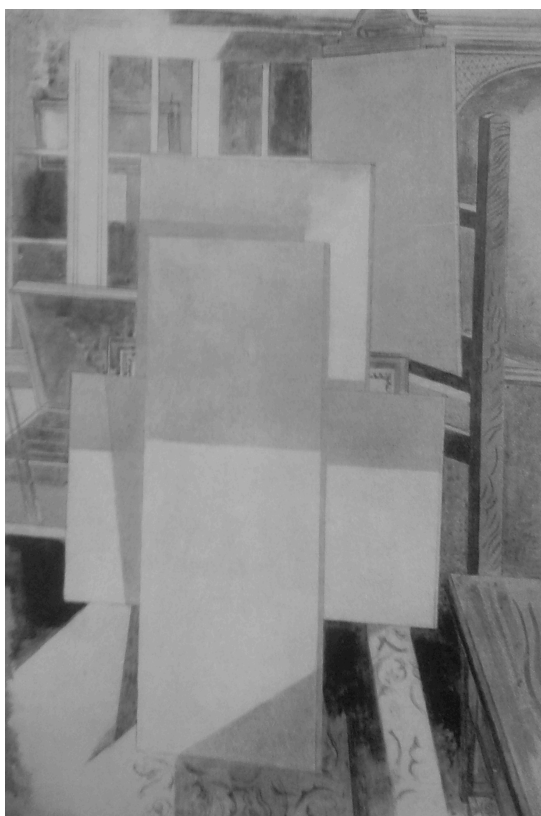
32 Paul Nash
Flight of the Magnolia, 1944
 Oil on canvas



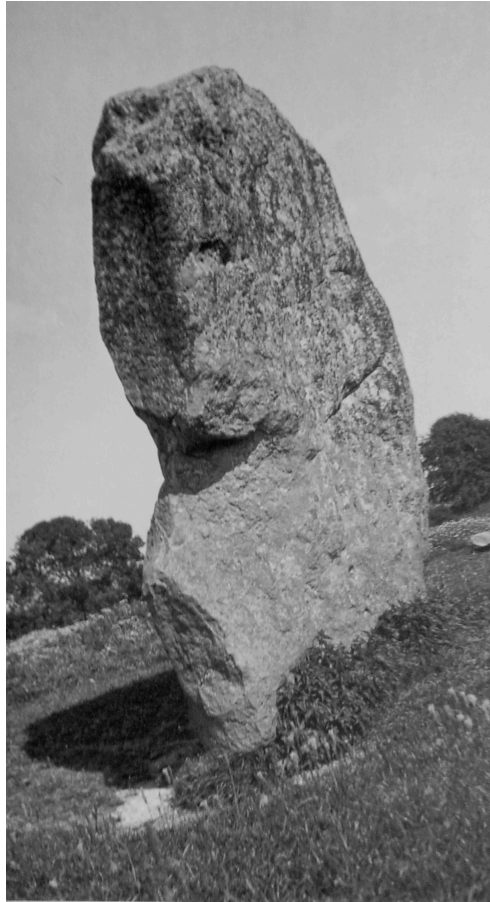
33 Paul Nash
Rye Marshes, 1932



34 Edward Wadsworth
Dux and Comes: Exhalation, 1933
 Tempera on canvas



35 Paul Nash
Studio, 1929
 Oil on canvas



36 Paul Nash
Avebury Sentinel, 1933



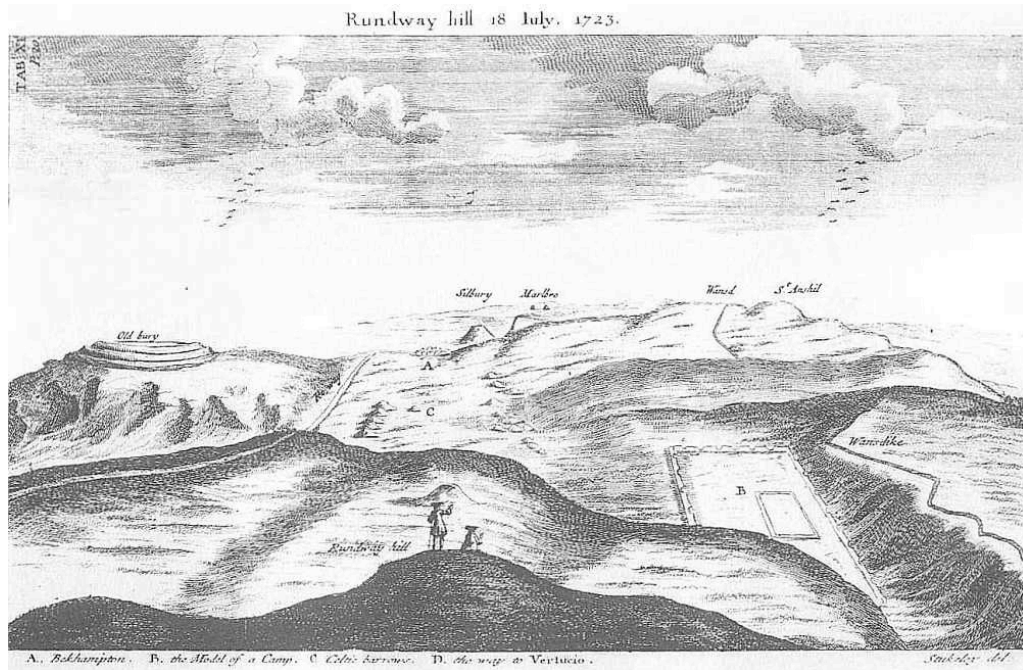
37 Edward Wadsworth
Composition on Pink Background, 1933
Tempera on gessoed panel



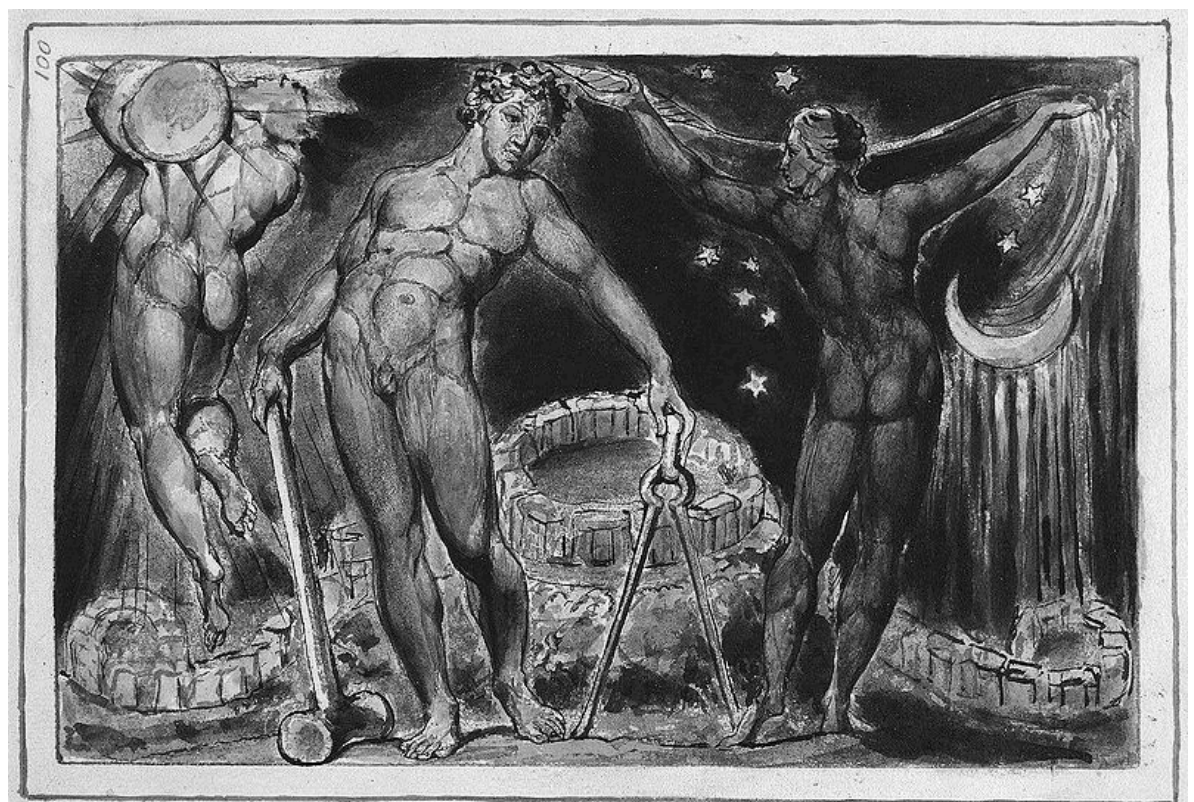
38 Paul Nash
Event on the Downs, 1934
 Oil on canvas



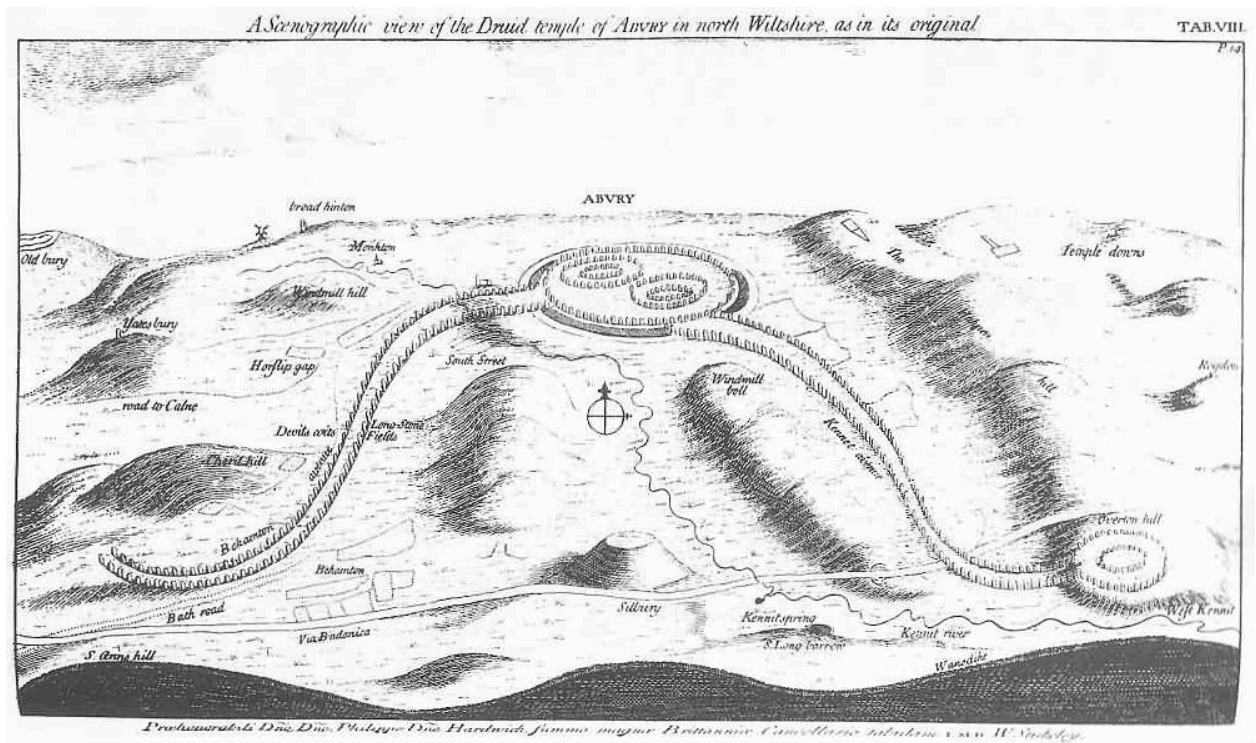
39 Paul Nash
Landscape of the Megaliths, 1937
 Watercolour on paper



40 William Stukeley
Rundway Hill 18th July 1723, 1743

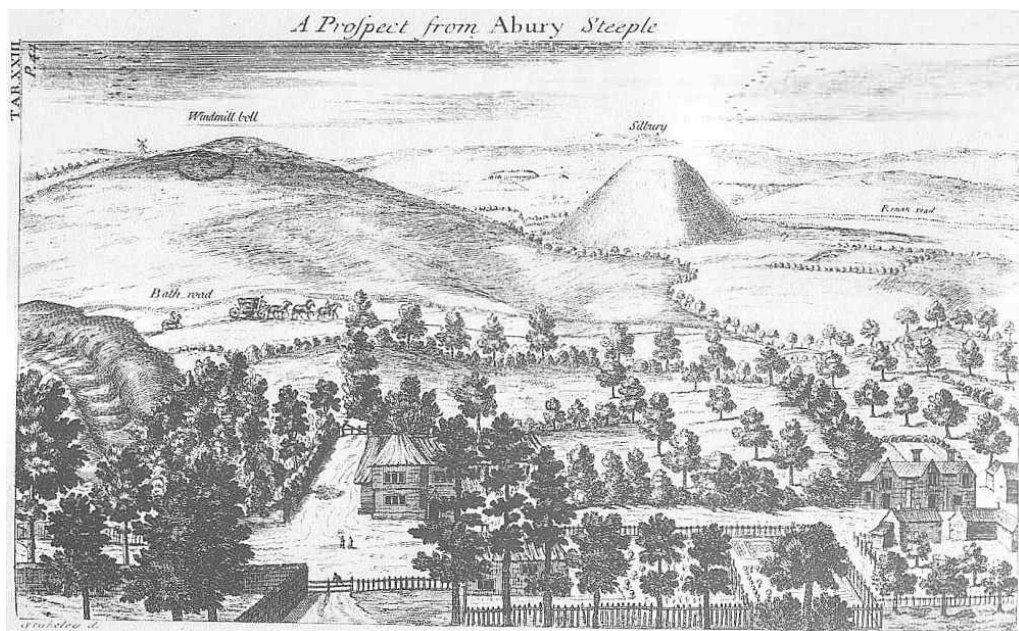


41 William Blake
Jerusalem, Plate 100, 1820



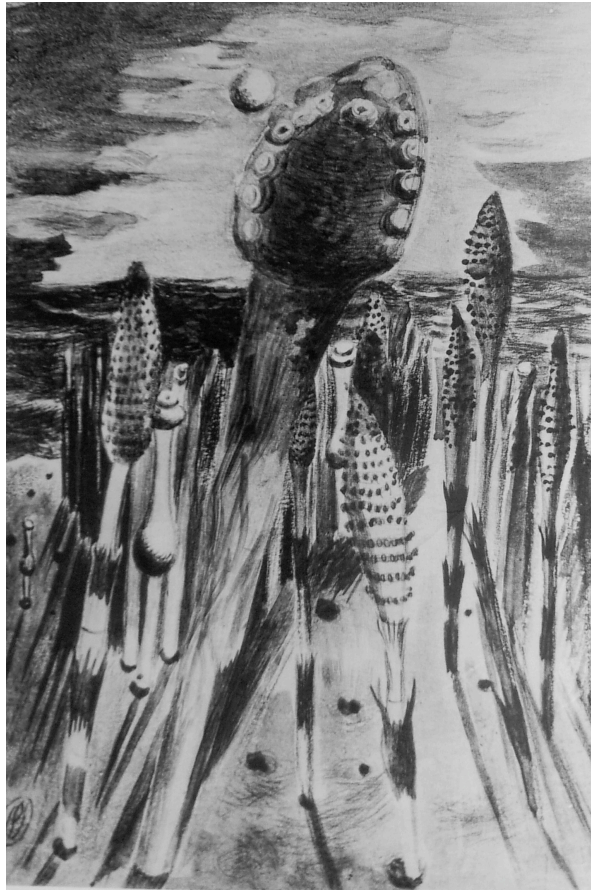
42 William Stukeley

A Scenographic View of the Druid Temple of Abury in North Wiltshire, 1743

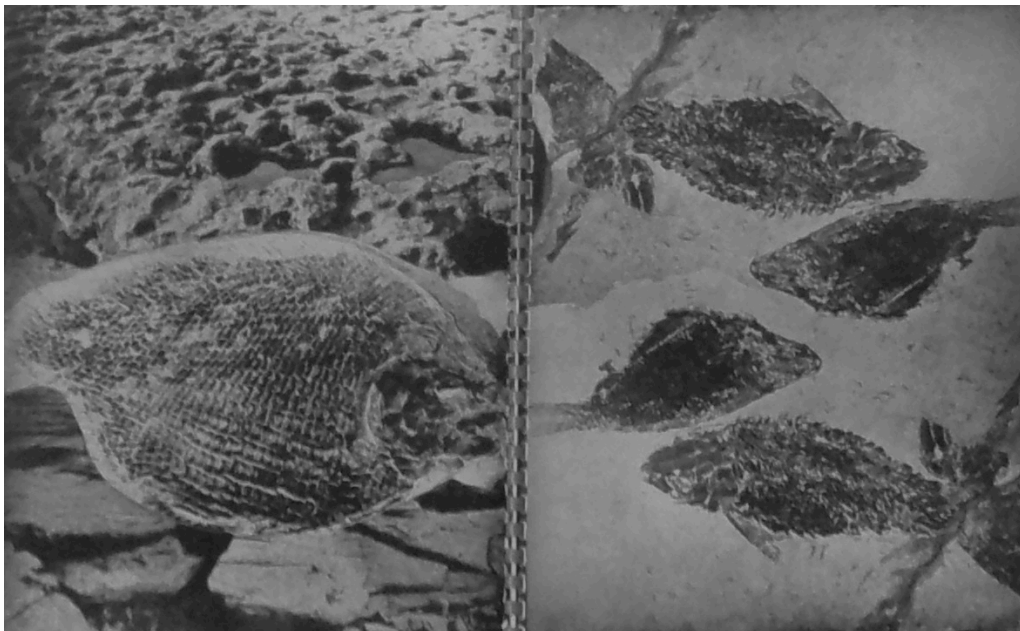


43 William Stukeley

A Prospect from Abury Steeple, 1743



44 Paul Nash
Wood of the Nightmares Tales, 1937
 Pencil and watercolour on paper



45 Dorset: *Shell Guide*, 1936
 Photomontage



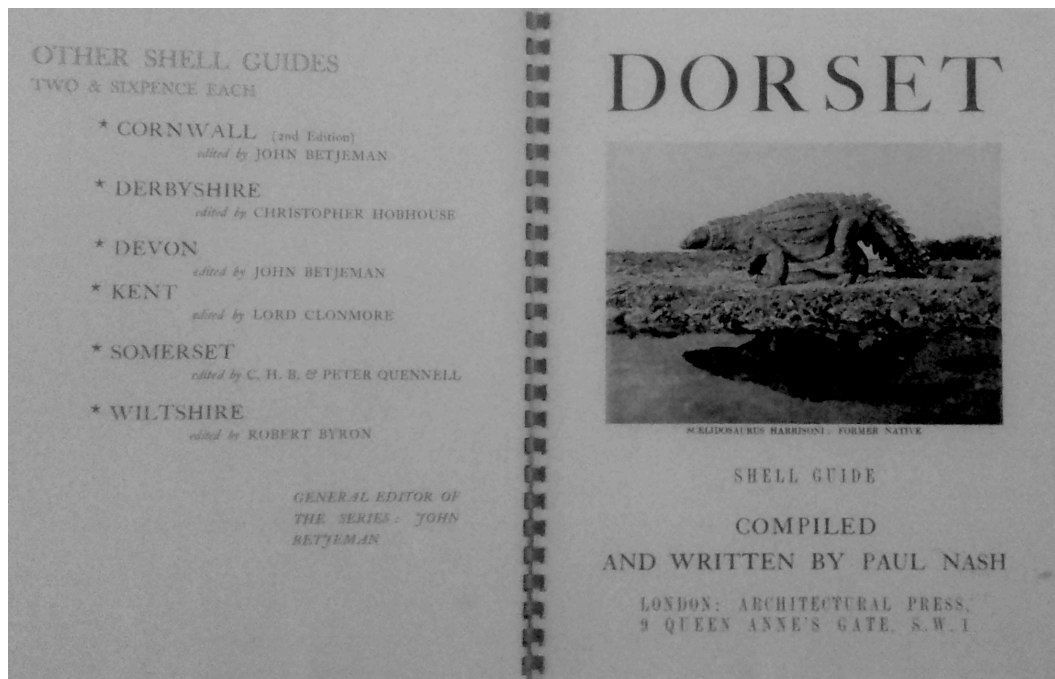
46 Edward Burra
Minuit Chanson, 1931
 Watercolour and gouache



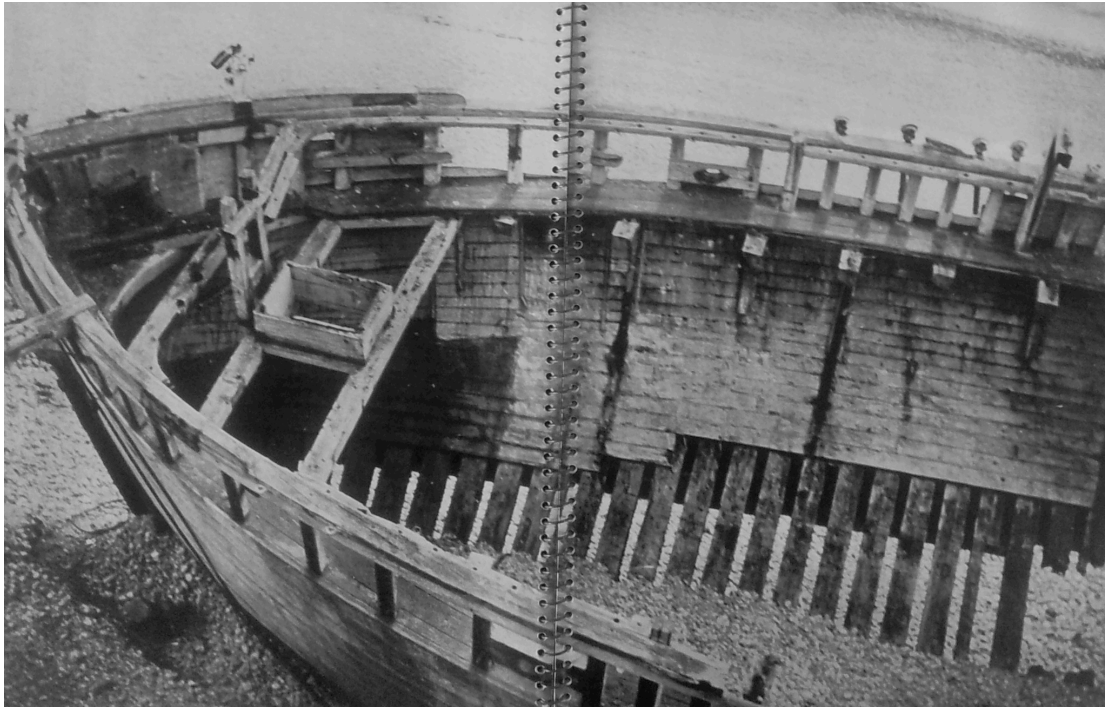
47 William Seabrook
 Untitled, 1930
 Photograph



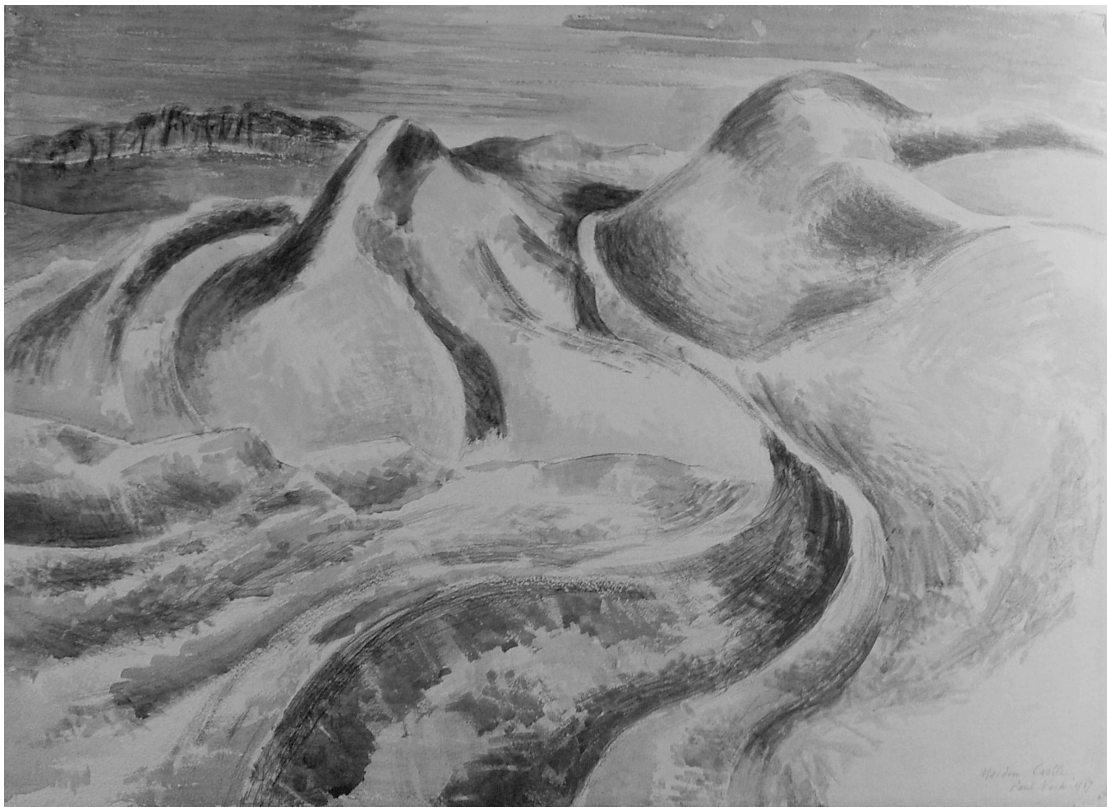
48 Edward Burra
Montage, 1930
Photomontage



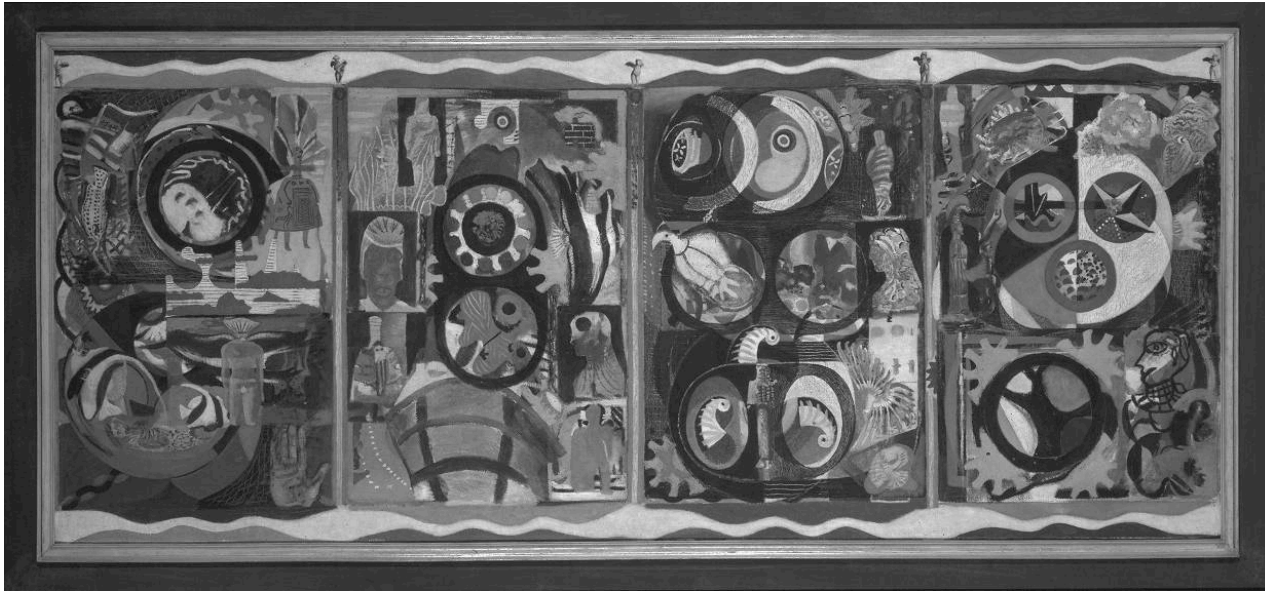
49 *Dorset Shell Guide*, 1936
Title page



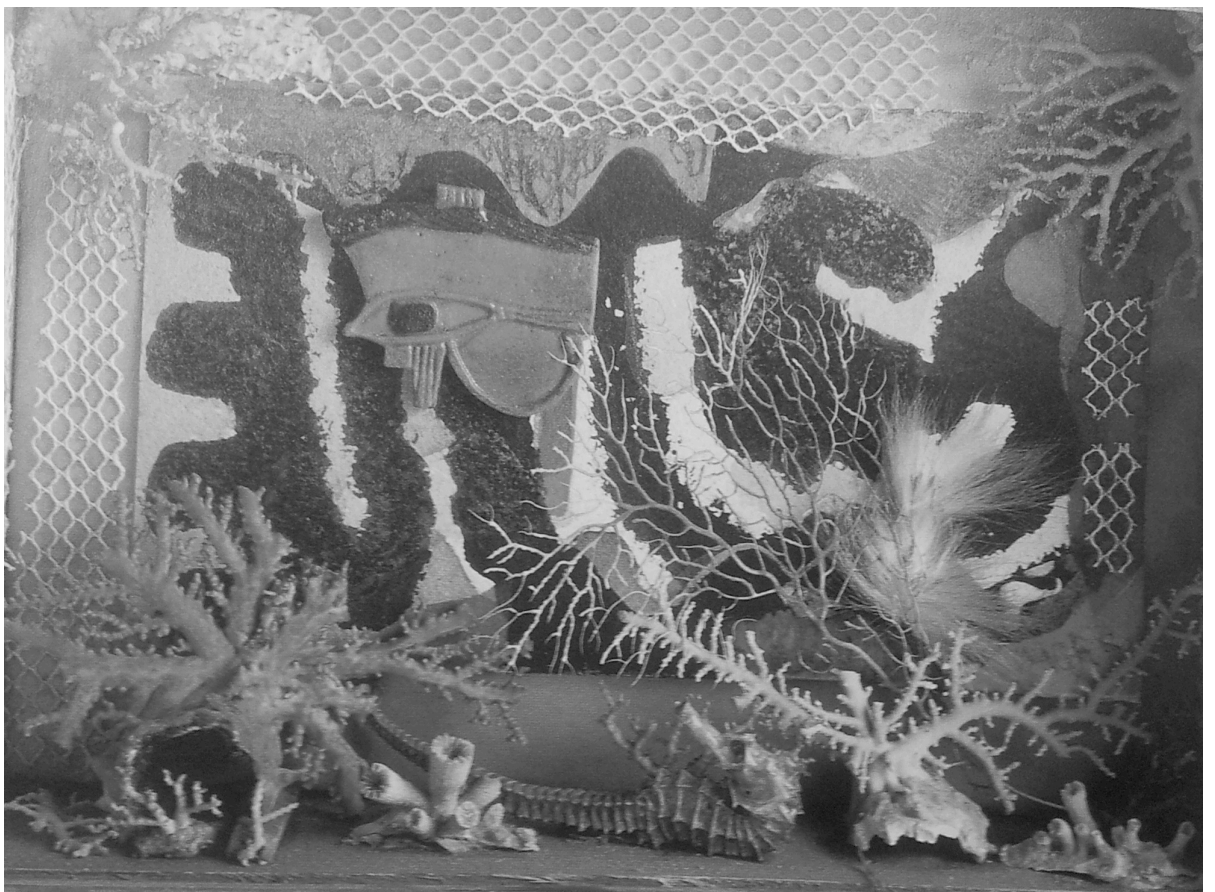
50 *Dorset Shell Guide*, 1936
 Photograph of shipwrecked boat



51 Paul Nash
Maiden Castle, 1937
 Pencil and watercolour on paper



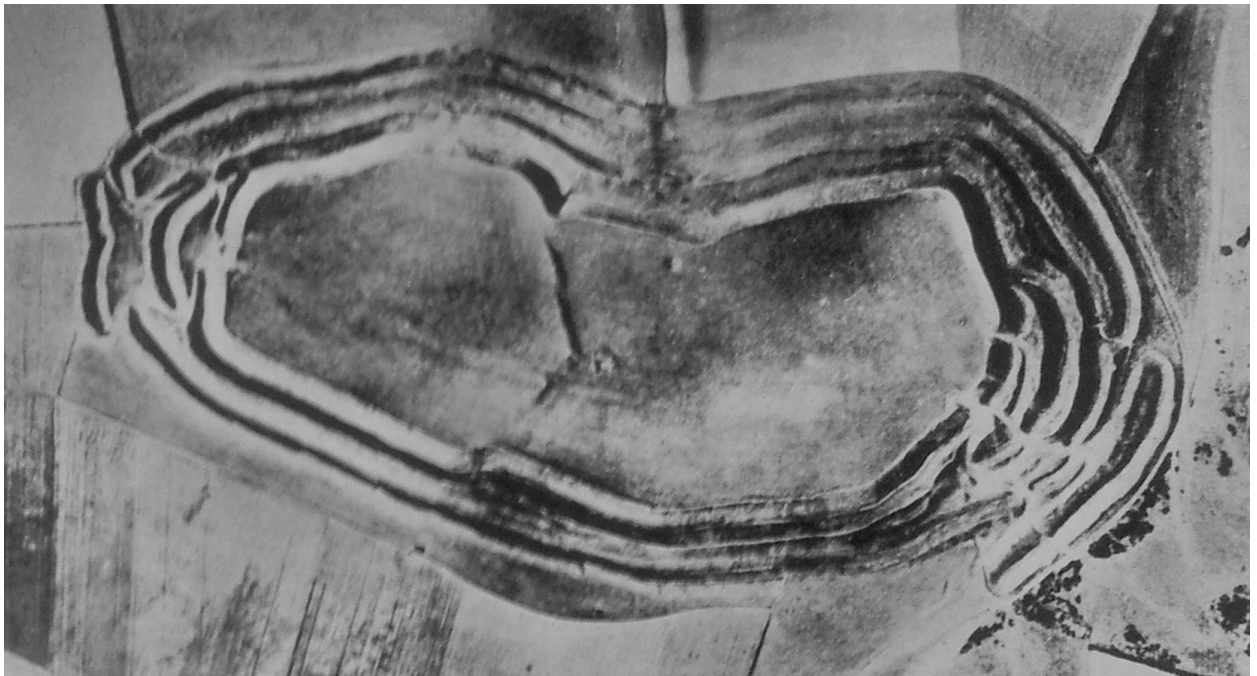
52 Eileen Agar
The Autobiography of an Embryo, 1933-4
 Oil on board



53 Eileen Agar
Untitled Box, 1935
 Collage



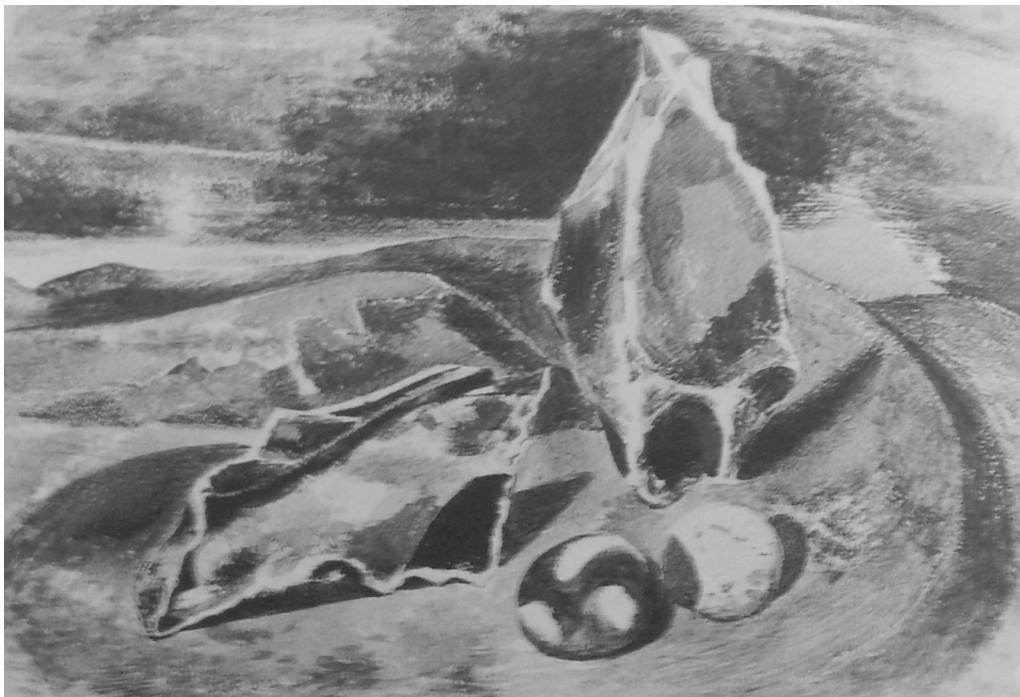
54 Paul Nash
Landscape from a Dream, 1936-8
 Oil on canvas



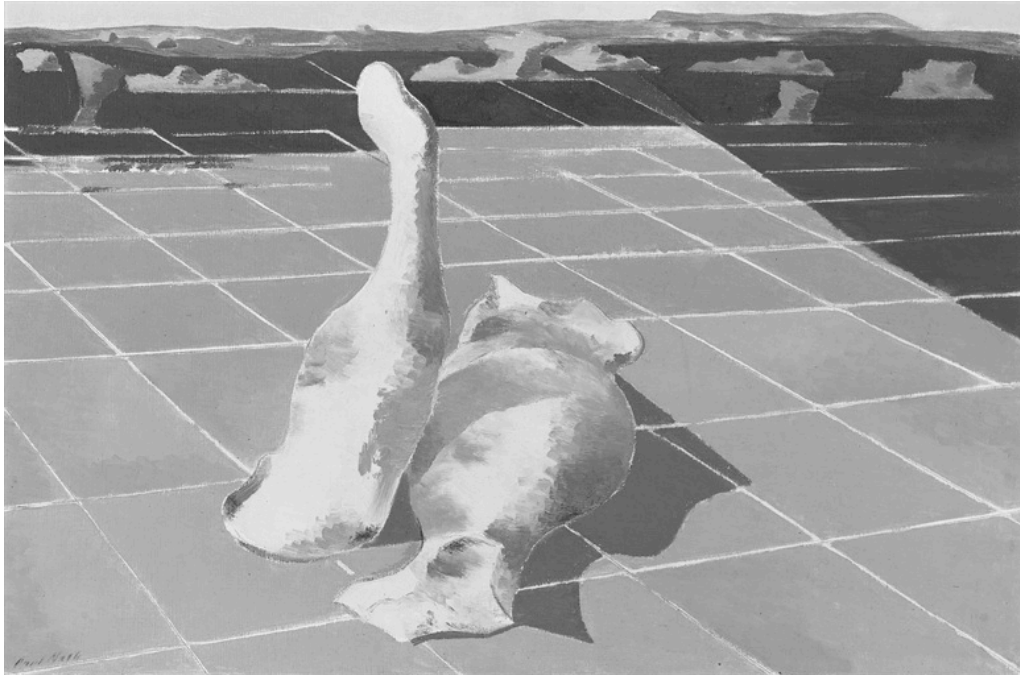
55 Dorset Shell Guide, 1936
 Aerial photograph of Maiden Castle



56 Alan Sorrell
Roman invasion at Maiden Castle, 1937



57 Paul Nash
Nest of the Wild Stones, 1937
 Watercolour on paper



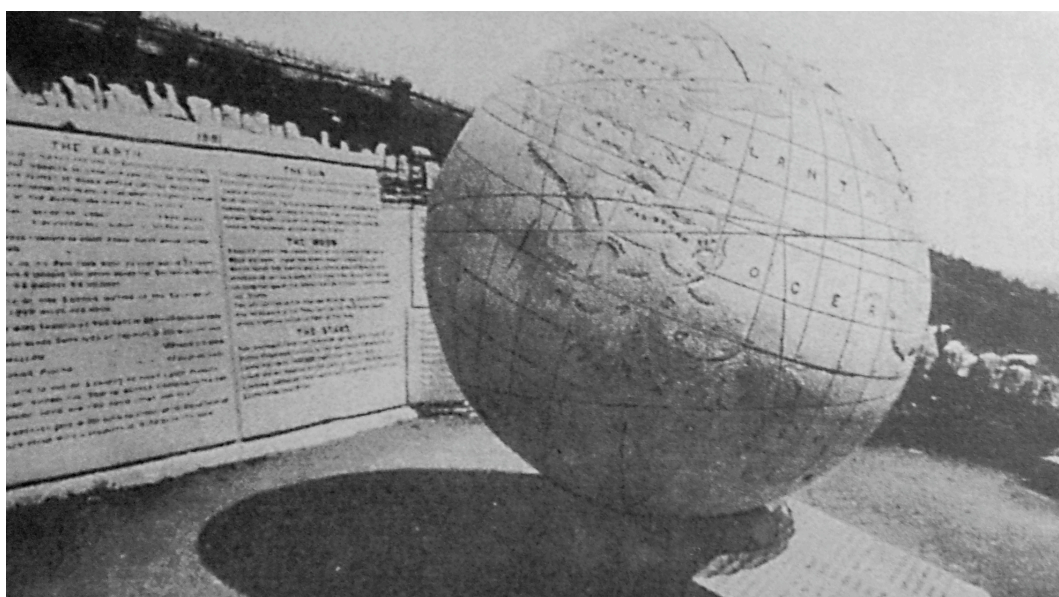
58 Paul Nash
Encounter in the Afternoon, 1936
 Oil on canvas



59 'Swanage Or Seaside Surrealism', 1936
 Photograph of the monument to Alfred the Great



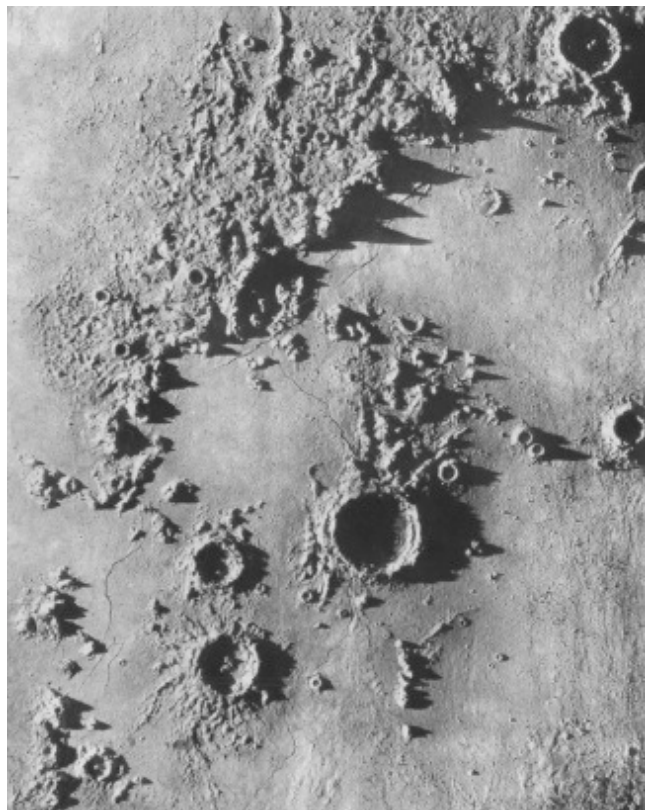
60 'Swanage Or Seaside Surrealism', 1936
 Photograph of the clockless clock tower



61 'Swanage Or Seaside Surrealism', 1936
 Photograph of The Globe



62 Paul Nash
Totes Meer, 1940-1
 Oil on canvas



63 James Nasmyth
 Plate IX from *The Moon Considered as a Planet, a World, and a Satellite*, 1874



64 Paul Nash
Landscape of the Summer Solstice, 1943
Oil on canvas